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**THE GENRE OF SCIENCE FICTION IN THE EMBODIMENT OF MENTAL
ILLNESS ISSUES**

By

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In accordance with Regulation 6.6 I certify that I have acknowledged any
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Creative Segment

Gardener of the Stars

The University of Ohio's Search for Extra-terrestrial Intelligence Program was officially over. But the Government didn't like being caught off guard, so there was still a token presence; a few dedicated researchers poring over old data and coordinating the efforts of armchair enthusiasts. Alezar looked up from his SETI reports as Chalmers walked in the office. He briskly shuffled his printouts into order.

"Any progress?" Chalmers asked.

"Well, data from the quadrant is promising. But consolidating that data will take more processing power than we actually have on this floor. If you'd open up another computer lab to us, we'd happily take another shot."

"When you say promising, what does that mean?"

"It means that the readings were off the scale, but we would need vastly more resources in order to eliminate natural astronomical phenomena."

"Which readings?"

"There was a pulse coming in using prime number intervals, which leads us to believe there may be information encoded in the signal. But without a massive upgrade we won't be able to tell you anything about the content; hostile, malicious, friendly or just a fluke."

"Would you be averse to addressing the board?"

"They've never shown this project much sympathy. Why are they sending invites out now?"

"We've been introduced to an extraordinary worker in the SETI field. However, he is so unorthodox that we've had to keep our affiliation with him on a deniable basis. I'd like to introduce the two of you. After that, you might feel more confident about applying for that upgrade."

"How long's this all going to take?"

"You don't sound keen"

“Well, frankly, I thought you were in here to fire me.”

“Okay, follow me.”

Alezar followed Chalmers down a few corridors and was eventually led to a Hospitality Suite near Reception. A rather dishevelled man, unkempt with a beard and tie-dyed shirt, was slouched on one of the chairs.

“You going to call Security, Chalmers?”

“Security? Ha! I want you to meet your new colleague. Alezar, this is Theo, our lay expert in matters SETI”. Theo smiled and gave a nervous wave.

“Right,” said Alezar. “Theo what is your Security Clearance?”

“Oh, about the same as yours. Chalmers has been briefing me on your progress over the years and I’m thrilled to be on board.”

“Well thank you, Chalmers.” Chalmers gave Alezar a grin.

“I’ll leave you two to brainstorm.” He said and went on his way.

“So, Alezar,” Theo stretched out on the Coach. “You requested more resources. I’m it.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Your SETI project’s data is going unprocessed? Let me have a look.”

“That’s... that’s not going to help, I need Supercomputers working in batches to crunch those numbers.”

“I think you’ll be surprised at how mathematically agile I can be. Chalmers launched me on you completely by surprise, didn’t he?”

“Yeah, what’s your background?”

“Rather unorthodox. Can we get coffee in here?”

Alezar indicated towards a cartridge drinks dispenser.

“Perfect,” said Theo. “Yeah, my angle on SETI is a little out there. I wish Chalmers had briefed you since I’m going to look stupid. I’m a fan of the New

Age, and I was messing around with Channelling, it's a kind of self-help fad. You heard of it?"

"No."

"Right. Well, I had this one intense session and wrote a bunch of it down and, on a dare, sent it in to your office. Apparently I gave them a scare since I was hauled in under the Patriot Act. I had to convince them that I'd come up with your exact data set independently and by coincidence. It got unpleasant, but fortunately I was able to fight my corner. Eventually they must have decided that the project might benefit from a new perspective because here I am."

"So your scientific background is...?"

"Non-existent. Besides what I read in Scientific American."

"This Channelling you do must be pretty impressive stuff. This is a Government Research Facility."

"I'm relieved, frankly. They were throwing around their favourite buzzword "National Security". I'm not rotting in Guantanamo, you notice."

"No, I'm sure it's hard to get taken seriously. The first main obstacle for threats to Homeland Security."

"Just a guy with a lot of crystals and several unopened novelty packs of Tarot Cards! Look at me now!"

The door opened and a black-suited man entered.

"I'm here to escort you to your new research station."

"This should be interesting," said Alezar. "I wonder if I'll have more paperclips than last time."

"Buck up," said Theo. "You'll be surprised just how much they were holding back on you."

"You've seen it?"

"Not all of it."

Alezar's old SETI office was a mere disused file room in the University of Ohio. He was expecting another room with a water cooler. The dark suited man escorted him and Theo to a black sedan car which drove them to an impressive purpose-built complex out in the wilds. Alezar gasped as they breezed through two security gates, one of which had recessed tire-spikes. Prominent on the skyline was a large radio dish. Off in the distance was what seemed to be a reflector-telescope tower; a large dome. The car pulled into a reception bay. The security guard moved briskly to the passenger side and opened the door.

"Mr Alezar, Mr Theo, would you step this way? Here are your identification passes."

Alezar noticed Theo had become rather subdued.

"Isn't this great, Theo?"

"I'll tell you what I think when we get a minute to ourselves. If they allow that here."

That was ominous, thought Alezar. The Security Guard was joined by some other men and women in either suits or lab coats. They had anxious, stern faces but still nodded and smiled. Alezar fumbled with his pass, clipping it onto his shirt. They were ushered through a reception hall and into a Lecture Theatre. Everyone took a seat. An older guy in a lab coat took the stand.

"Hello everyone, and apologies for the peremptory way you've been seconded onto this project. I'm Seth Shostak, retired Alien Contact researcher. SETI research has been on the wane since the 1990s, when it became clear that sponsoring Governments would never fully support research whose import would disrupt conventional society, with its established religions and culture of consumer contentment. To reveal that we are not a superior race, to reveal that we do not have technological supremacy, would cause rioting and disaffection together with an economic crash."

He paused, and switched on the Power-point Display.

"So, you have all been, in your own way, involved in astronomical research of one kind or another. You may be familiar with the excitement around the discovery of Pulsars, which were at first thought to be beacons from other Worlds transmitting messages to us, not the high density, radio-wave-emitting objects

we now know them to be. But there are still mysteries in our field. The “Wow” signal. The Phobos photographs. That annoying tranche of UFO sightings we cannot easily dismiss as mass hysteria.”

All through his speech, Shostak had been flicking from one illustrative photograph to another. Alezar glanced over at Theo and noticed that he looked distinctly bored and unimpressed, yawning and staring at his fingernails. The speaker continued.

“The grandeur of early communication attempts has diminished. The plaque on the Voyager Probe. The encoded signal to a distant star. These are forgotten and paltry efforts on our part to contact off-world civilisations. And every year we have to contend with new hoaxes, so that our profession is stunted by our inability to be taken seriously.

Which leads me to the matter of the hour. As many of you know, two weeks ago a transmission was detected coming in from the constellation of Pegasus; a distinctive prime-number pulse which we believe encodes information in its frequency modulation. We’re still working on the decryption. But once again we have to face the distinct possibility we are not alone and the ethical dilemma that this raises.”

Theo leant across to Alezar and whispered:

“They’re shutting us down.”

“So,” the speaker continued, “I must ask your full denial until we have thoroughly validated the data.”

Theo stood up.

“If the data is valid, might we be going public this time?”

The speaker coughed and adjusted his glasses.

“That is something we are not in a position to consider as yet. First things first. Are there any other questions?”

The crowd appeared to be bored and restless. Almost as though they’d seen the presentation before. Alezar had a half-formed question in his mind, but the apathy in the room dissuaded him from raising it. He sighed and hoped there’d

be another time for it. Seth Shostak had seemed unnerved by the question, was that really so unusual a thing to be asked? Alezar turned to Theo.

“What am I missing here?”

“This is a charade. There is a cycle, a procedure to go through in the throes of Alien Contact. I’ve had my suspicions and I think I’ve cracked it. There’s never any intention of establishing contact with other civilisations. Seth knows this and he’s been schooled that while the overt policy is to keep enthusiasts on tenterhooks, really the MO is to run silent and wait for the Aliens to give up or pass us by.”

“Why’s that?” Alezar whispered.

“It’s something to do with anthropologist Margaret Mead. There’s a fear that the wider public would be so enthralled with Alien technologies they’d react like islanders did to WWII Navy ships; form cargo cults.”

“I see. Well, if that’s the case isn’t it a good plan?”

“Well it works at the expense of the Truth, if you can bear that. But I have a deeper concern. I’m concerned that running silent on the Aliens might not always be the wisest move. It may imply disinterest, it may imply disregard, it may imply we can’t even hear them, but what if they’re smarter than that? What if they find it insulting?”

“I don’t follow.”

“I’ll give you an analogy. Take Facebook. You try and ‘friend’ someone and they disregard you; you went to the same schools, you did the same course and now you’re in the same career. And they still don’t friend you. And you’re not on there for the fad value, you genuinely need to reach out, friending would mean a lot to you. You might be in a swamp of depression. And they don’t friend you? That’s where I think the aliens are right now. This policy of disregard might tip them over. And if they are more advanced than us they might... they might take measures.”

“Measures? Violence? That’s hardly advanced.”

“True, but we might have just failed their idea of a Turing Test. From their point of view, we might seem to be pond scum for all our cool disdain. They might come over lasers firing. That’s why I wanted to rattle Seth’s cage.”

“Okay. But what’s next?”

“What’s next? Coffee break. They send us back to the cubicle farms. We write reports, the reports are filed and nothing happens.”

“Ah.”

“Unless you’d like to go rogue with me on this one.” Theo smiled. “I sense you’re as disillusioned as I am.”

Alezar looked round the auditorium. The other scientists and office workers were huddled around a coffee dispenser that had been wheeled in.

“Let me just try something,” Theo said. He walked out onto the presentation floor. “Hey, excuse me? I’m Theo Drake and I thought it might be useful to network this project? I’m just going to write my email on the board, and if anyone wants to Contact me about SETI, anything at all, just drop me a line, okay? Thanks.” He went up to the whiteboard and wrote up his email address. Alezar noticed at once it was an old-style account that he didn’t think was still in use, but he supposed it wasn’t something to get judgemental over.

Seth Shostak had set up a stall off to one side, with piles of his book “Confessions of an Alien Hunter” at a discount price. Every so often someone would ask for a signed copy. Alezar flipped through one noncommittally, smiled and moved on.

“Theo, I’m going to call it a day. I don’t know what to make of this, it seems you-”

“Do you mind giving me a lift?”

“Sure, as long as it’s local. We should get together and talk.”

“Who knows, I might get a lot of email over this one.”

“There’s always the office.”

"I'm not so sure they'll be keeping it running. If they're letting unorthodox people like me onto the project, don't you think that's desperate?"

"I don't mind you."

"No, but still." Theo was looking uncomfortable again.

"Did you want to find a bar?" Alezar asked.

"No, that's alright. We could swap some emails if you like." Theo handed over a card with the antiquated email address on it.

"Spiritualist'?" read Alezar.

"It's an old card, I'm not into that anymore." Theo gathered up his coat and made for the exit. Alezar followed and made his way to his car. Glancing around for Theo, Alezar noticed that Theo appeared to be walking home.

"I thought you wanted a lift?"

"Oh, I'll be fine really, if I don't catch you on email I'll see you at the office."

Alezar shrugged and clambered into his car. It was a clunky Ford a friend of his had badgered him into buying, which was the downside of having a second-hand car salesman as a friend.

Arriving back home Alezar immediately logged on in his home office to send an email.

"Theo," it read. "Interested to hear about your SETI experience and how you want to contribute. I think you may be right about the project going under. Looking forward to talking again, Alezar."

He hit send.

Alezar lived in an apartment block and had raised eyebrows moving in due to his extensive magazine collection. It seemed to be an office joke that SETI researchers were frustrated Science Fiction fans. Alezar closed his email and tried to login to his office's Intranet. His password was refused. He tried again, typing it out one character at a time. Still refused.

Oh well. He tipped out some dried food for his cat Hammerstein. Rummaging in his coat, he found Theo's card. There was a mobile number on it. It didn't look all

that special as a calling card, but Alezar supposed the Spiritualist scene didn't ask for much. He dialled the number. Answer machine.

"Theo, I'm trying to access my workstation and the password is down, I wondered if you were having the same problem. Could you get back to me so perhaps we could share your account until it's fixed?" Alezar was ready to give up for the day.

Suddenly there was a ring on the doorbell. Alezar rolled his eyes and went to answer. He found a man in a black suit and dark glasses standing on his porch.

"Alezar Edgemont?"

"Yes."

The man held up some ID.

"I'm here on a matter of national security, would you mind accompanying me to our field office? We feel that some mutual understanding would be beneficial. I assure you we don't want to disrupt your schedule beyond reason."

"Why do you say that?"

"Homeland has a bad rap. And you're recording our conversation." The agent pointed out a discreet camera Alezar had over the door.

"I'm happy," the agent continued, "to say on the record that you're not about to be 'disappeared'. But we do need to talk and our facility is comfortable and suitably equipped."

"This isn't the best time. Couldn't I just take your card?"

The agent smiled. "Yes, here. But let me warn you you're embarking on a precarious endeavour." He smiled again and walked off into the night.

The next day Alezar turned up at his office in the University of Ohio. He tried Theo's Mobile.

"Hi Alezar."

"Theo! I was just getting your answer machine. Any reason you didn't come in today?"

“There’s been a problem with my security clearance. I wondered if you’d like to come over to my crib and talk SETI, I’ve got some cool stuff set up.”

“Okay, what’s the address?”

Theo lived in a house out in the country. A woman called Shoshana opened the door.

“So you’re Theo’s new friend? Come on in, he’s meditating.”

The house was full of throw-pillows and overspilling bookshelves. Here and there was a dreamcatcher or windchime. The décor was unashamedly New Age. Alezar found Theo sitting cross-legged among a pile of CDs. He smiled and wrenched off his headphones.

“Hi Alezar, hope you don’t find this overwhelming.”

“I’m not as buttoned down as I appear. You wanted to talk SETI?”

“Sure, did you sort out your passwords?”

“I’ve got the dataset on memory stick now, so I don’t have to worry about that again.”

“Great. You met Shoshana?”

“Yes, is she your... your significant other?”

“No, no. This is sort of an intentional community. We have flat-shares, Internet Message Boards, Festivals.”

“What’s your ethos?”

“Well, it’s mainly for people who’ve been let down by the current care-in-the-community system, so you will find a lot of neurodiversity people here. But there’s a spiritual dimension too. But not a dogmatic one. You know spirituality, it’s fairly one-size-fits-all, right?”

“I suppose. Do the Feds give you any trouble? This guy in dark glasses doorstepped me.”

“Yeah, that’ll happen. They’re over-budgeted, it means they snoop on anything. It’s post 9/11 paranoia. You’ll find we’re quite boring as hippies go.”

Shoshana came in with some coffee.

“Theo, our guest would probably like to hear more about your channelling techniques?”

“Oh yes,” said Theo. “Now I should tell you that I no longer strictly believe in Spiritualism as fervently as I used to. I used to sit for a circle of mediums and I would produce a spirit voice foretelling the coming of a Utopian age of Mankind, that kind of thing. I now see that as a complex interplay of what the psychologists call ‘unconscious fraud’, where the performance pressure makes you deliver something like a Spirit Message, and then part of the performance pressure makes you force yourself to forget that you’ve made it up.”

“Interesting,” said Alezar.

“Well, I got out of it. It was quite embarrassing actually, since whenever you make extensive prophesies up, you’ll get something right by accident!

Now, the SETI stuff that we both work on. I received that dataset by the same basic method, automatic writing, and then I find out that it’s a real dataset. That’s a little bit different. It’s not like saying ‘your husband died of a heart attack’ and appearing to be psychic, because that’s playing the odds. A set of impersonal data, that’s too much of a fluke.”

“Okay, shall we see if we can extract something?”

“Sure, Alezar.”

Alezar brought out his laptop and called up the processing software. The dataset broke down into a stack of prime number bursts that symbolised binary data. The character that emerged from the grid appeared to be a stylised smiley face. Alezar smirked and called up some frequency modulation analysis, which showed further encrypted symbols.

“As I was saying,” Theo returned to his theme, “this is unprecedented. I had this idea that the only reason the dataset match was sent to my brain was to show the aliens were in earnest. If we tried to make contact again they might be more direct than just sending friendly symbols. They might speak to us.”

“I thought you didn’t believe in the psychic phenomena?”

“I don’t. But I think we have a one-off here. We happen to have a fad on Earth towards Spirit Communications. It’s all down to wish-thinking and performance pressure, but it’s still widespread and some people take it seriously. And the aliens have found the technology to beam info into people’s brains. Or at least, my brain.”

“I guess you’re uninhibited enough to come forward about it.”

Theo sighed “I have a lot of time on my hands.”

Alezar sensed he should say something to that, but couldn’t think what. He held up his laptop.

“There are five basic characters that are being used in different combinations. I believe each combination represents a word in a limited vocabulary set.”

“Well, if I re-established contact, then we won’t have to worry about decryption. Just don’t lose that dataset or I’ll have no credibility.”

“Just your mental contact on its own wouldn’t hold up much. We’d need time-stamped footage of the readings arriving and an isolated feed of your automatic writing preceding the readings and matching up to them. Otherwise you’ll get called a hoaxter.”

Theo sighed. “I know. But don’t you want to surge ahead? You believe me, don’t you?”

“Yes, but I don’t think we should abandon protocol.”

Shoshana cut in.

“Guys, from what Theo said to me it seems your project is being mothballed anyway. I think you should go rogue; hack the feed, transcribe the messages, go public on Youtube. You’ve got an idea of what the aliens are saying already, haven’t you?”

“Yeah. It’s not pretty. Being attached to a SETI department was the only chance of being taken seriously. It’s asking too much of our circle of friends to hack in and ransack data.”

“I’d like to see one of these Channelling sessions,” said Alezar.

Theo shifted uncomfortably. "I don't really do them anymore. I'm concerned you'd think I was going insane. Would you mind if I recorded us?"

"No, that's all right."

Theo rummaged in a draw and found a small digital camcorder. He stacked some books to prop it up against then pressed record.

"All right. Recorded attempt of a channelling session. Usually I'd be writing this down but for this session I'll be automatic speaking."

The room filled with an eerie hush. Theo sighed and relaxed in the lotus position. Alezar shot a glance across to Shoshana, who smiled and nodded back at him. Suddenly Theo emitted a guttural moan.

"Greetings Earthmen. Greetings Earthmen. We are concerned not to receive a reply from our message. We made it as easy to decrypt as possible. This is not the first time we've approached you. Why do you ignore us?"

Shoshana glanced at Alezar then sighed. She decided to take on the role the situation demanded.

"I've been told that we have a policy of non-intervention. We do not feel our populace is sophisticated enough to deal with the information that other civilisations exist. Most people can barely deal with the idea that other religions exist. And so our stance is to wait until you tire of our disregard and move on."

The presence within Theo seemed to consider this for a while.

"Would you require a more persuasive demonstration of our abilities? We have a concern not to be disruptive ourselves. It's just that your planet is reaching the level of sophistication where aligning with a Galactic neighbour and sharing knowledge would be to your advantage. We can help with your environmental and economic problems. If we wanted to we could infiltrate your Global Computer Network and scare people into taking notice."

Shoshana put a tone of concern in her voice. "Although you've approached the right people, although one would expect SETI engineers to be more enthusiastic about this news, you have to compete with charlatans. Unless you demonstrate your existence more compellingly, no-one will take notice. And even if you do make contact, there is still the possibility that Government departments will

move in and make your efforts look like a hoax. There is too much invested in the status quo.”

Theo exhaled loudly. A sigh of contempt?

“We are under pressure ourselves to justify our choice of contact. A Higher Authority than ours will want to know if your civilisation is turning towards hostility in this ‘disregard’ you speak of. And be assured, we will not be permitted to ‘move on’ this time. This time we may be required to spade you under for the greater benefit of your intergalactic neighbourhood. This is not a decision we take lightly.”

Theo relaxed. He then blinked and looked around.

“I think the Channel’s broken now. We could have another session tomorrow. Like I say, I hate to give the impression that I’m making it up or crazy. There are literally thousands of claims like this out there.”

“Yeah,” said Alezar. “This is going to be a hard sell.”

“Well, I tell you,” said Theo, “they also said that this intelligence is being sent into multiple receivers. So there’s going to be a whole bunch of people out there with this message for Mankind. And they’ll all be swept aside in a wave of plausible deniability; something in the drinking water. Mass hysteria. The one time it’s actually happening for real!”

Shoshana cut in, eyes wide with cautionary force, “Theo, you have to remember that until we have some secondary confirmation, you might as well be insane as far as we’re concerned. I’m so sorry to be blunt like that.”

Alezar choked “You mean you’re not a contact, Shoshana?”

“No, but this is my field. I do Spirit readings for schools. I’m a con-artist made good, my readings are to demonstrate how Spiritualists sucker people in emotionally. But I was a bad girl for a long time. Theo and I are friends from group therapy.”

“Yeah,” said Theo. “Scamming people is a compulsion, didn’t you know? It does nothing for my SETI credibility, but there it is on the CV!”

Theo seemed deflated. Alezar tried to think of something positive.

“I’m not going to forget the dataset correlation, Theo. It’s too much of a coincidence.”

“They’ll accuse you of confabulating the data to secure the budget, it’s rather convenient you struck oil in an era of cuts in this field.”

“I can play them the track on the digi-tapes, what more do they want?”

“Guys, guys,” said Shoshana. “Can we take a break from it? I thought of something that might cheer you up, Theo.”

Shoshana drew out her laptop. She hit in a Google search. Eventually the screen lit up with a cylindrical shaped object photographed from far away. The photo then twisted in closer and increased in definition. And then twisted in closer again and increased in definition again. It looked like it had a sparkling grid covering its surface. And all the while this was happening, the soft electronic music Alezar recognised from Bladerunner played, with Rutger Hauer’s voice-over:

“I’ve seen things you people wouldn’t believe....”

“What is that?” asked Alezar.

“Well, a lot of people think it’s fake. But the story is that it’s a Russian Photograph of a UFO near the small moon of Mars, Phobos. I happen to think it’s very pretty. And if you want to be cynical, if you want to say that UFOs don’t exist and there’s a bunch of unscrupulous people out there cashing in on gullible people, then I say that the moment of inspiration is worth it. Crashing disillusion is on the way, and they’ll need to find a new hobby, but until then it’ll keep them going.”

“You know what I like about it?” said Theo. “I like the idea that the Aliens saw us getting more advanced in Space Exploration then decided to pack up and leave!”

“I know, there’s another video of a rocket test launch that has a UFO apparently trying to fire plasma at it, to get it to fail.”

“I don’t know about that,” said Alezar. “But I read in New Scientist that Mars has Methane Emission hotspots. What’s producing the methane?!”

“Cows?” laughed Shoshana. “That’s what produces methane pollution here on Earth.”

"You know," said Alezar. "There are people with no sense of wonder, and these are the people who'll never come around to accepting your transmissions as authentic. Maybe that's the aliens' stumbling block; maybe they have no equivalent in their society to disaffection and apathy."

Theo smiled. "There's this thing called the Martha Mitchell phenomenon, which is when Doctors diagnose people as crazy in too much of a hurry. Ruins their lives. It's named after someone trying to blow the whistle on Nixon and the Watergate affair, so the Security Services had her put away as a delusional and an alcoholic!"

"Fascinating," said Alezar. "And I heard that this psychiatrist wanted to make a point about the reliability of diagnoses, so he got himself and some students diagnosed with some lie, and they ended up having to play along with the label for the rest of their lives."

"Sounds like Rosenhan."

"Can we order pizza?" asked Shoshana.

Twenty minutes later they were laughing and sharing a pepperoni pizza.

"Look," said Theo. "I hate to do this but I have to chuck you out. Some of our other residents will be back and you might make them nervous. I like to break them in gently with strangers. So we'll do this again?"

"Sure" said Alezar as he looked around for his coat.

Alezar walked out to his car with the warm sense he'd made a friend for life. Certainly the talk of Alien Spaceships evacuating Mars was unsettling, but he put it down to the man's sense of whimsy. Why interfere with his dreams, if they spurred him on? And if they seemed a little too flakey to hang out with, it would give a bit of edge to his life. He tried to imagine how his drinking friends would take it:

"So you finally heard something down at SETI? Where's the Red Carpet, the Lear Jet to Buckingham Palace, where's the caviar? You were eating pizza in the next best thing to a squat?!"

That's what they'd say. The drive home was swift. He let himself in and threw his coat down. He looked around gratefully at the minimalist order he favoured, and exhaled the sense of shame roughhousing at Theo's had left him with.

A hand grabbed his shoulder.

"I did warn you, Alezar." It was the damn Secret Agent. Who swiftly grabbed Alezar's right hand and twisted it up behind his back.

"He's just a dreamer, he's not about to bomb some Free Clinic. I know psycho when I'm around it and that guy is not psycho he's just depressed."

"One of the things," the agent snarled, "that makes a good 'psycho' is the ability to blend in."

"*One of the things. So that's it, you're going to haul in everyone with that particular social skill?*"

"You don't seem to appreciate what uncontrolled UFO intelligence would do to the nation. If our sense of prerogative over this World is threatened, then the social order breaks down. We need peace."

"By which you mean drones."

"That hippie crap is really setting up a festering home in your mind, isn't it? Yes, drones if you like. Keep the machine of capitalism grinding along one more day. Do you want to go back to the days of 'Don't kill me for my gold or my God will get you'? Because that's where getting everyone running out into the street staring moony-eyed up at the sky once too often will get you."

"Theo assures me the Aliens don't want to plunge us into anarchy. They bring enlightenment."

"Ha! We've all heard that one. Waco was Enlightened. Jonestown was Enlightened. The Manson Family was Enlightened. Damn old Al Quaeda was Enlightened. They are going to fry our culture and make us into a slave race."

"I don't think they have an employment problem. I think they care too much."

"Well, that's still hostile in my manual. If we're so damn incredible, they should let us win our own wars."

“So you’d set your own leg if you broke it? You’d begrudge a Doctor moving in with his expertise.”

“Expertise? Well, that’s nothing like this Enlightenment you’ve glommed onto. Expertise is focussed. Expertise is practical.”

“Perhaps they’ve outgrown practical concerns.”

“Or are they telling you they’re pure energy to put honey in the trap?”

“Let go of my arm, you’re hurting!” Alezar was hurled across the room into a chair.

“We deal with this a lot, damn it! ‘A glorious new age for humanity’! Don’t you have any pride in the fact that it’s *our* glorious age?”

“Have you got someone waiting in the dark for everyone on this project?”

“We’re hoping they’ll run out of enthusiasm. You struck me as more motivated than the rest of that crew.”

“I’d like you to leave. If you’re not arresting me, then leave.”

“I wish that were possible but things have escalated.”

“So what did you think of him?” Theo asked Shoshana.

“Well, he’s a bit of a stiff, but it must be nice to have another companion to the Cause?”

“Don’t call it that. Don’t get into the habit. We’ve got to bring him around slowly. How many of our Brethren are in the back room?”

“There are about five.”

“Right, so if I summon the Rift down here, would they like to travel?”

“Seems so.”

“Right, I’ll summon it.” Theo stood in the middle of the lounge and breathed. A shimmering plane appeared in the centre of the room. A voice emerged; it was thin and jarred on the nerves.

“Are you going to send us more samples?”

“Yes, they are preparing themselves.”

“Good,” the voice shot back. “Let them know they can join us.”

At that moment the door burst open and the hall filled with ATF agents with guns.

“Freeze!” yelled the leader. “We are shutting this cult down. You will be transferred to a psychiatric facility to be assessed for fitness to stand trial. Your acolytes will be assessed for psychological damage. Everybody out!” Other agents swarmed into the back rooms and ferretted out every member of Theo’s Brethren.

“What do you mean escalated?”

The agent held out a PDA. “These are jpegs of your friend Theo being taken into psychiatric care. This was a joint endeavour by police and ATF, as cult activity allows for the assumption of a hoard of weapons at the premises”

Alezar scoffed. “Oh, come on, he wouldn’t hurt anyone. And it wasn’t so much a cult as it was a book-club.”

“Nevertheless he’s been hauled in. And your Alien Contact story is bound to come up in his assessment, be prepared for him to contact you.”

“Should we get over there?”

“Well, I have a nasty feeling that Theo’s Alien friends will beat us to it.”

“You accept our story now?”

“Our agents found a dimensional portal in the house. It’s the part of the siege that’ll get buried at the report stage. But we still have to anticipate a hostile backlash from the aliens.”

“If you were worried about the aliens’ intentions, then why did you bust the cult? Why drag everybody in?”

“We didn’t want to, it was procedural. Once people complain to the ATF they tend to take that as carte blanche to improvise. There’s a chance a sealed report will make mention of a wonderful lost opportunity to make contact with extra-terrestrial life.”

“So what’s going on in the World?” the Psych Nurse asked Theo.

“I’m telling you I work for SETI. Stop looking at me like that. Naturally I have a bunch of friends with the same interests. Those guys at ATF probably had to justify their budget busting in on us like that. We’re not all David Koresh, you know, there are still a lot of nice people in the World. Who like get-togethers. But what would you know about nice people after all this working in a Psych Ward?”

It didn’t go over well. Alezar didn’t get to meet Theo for a week.

“I have a Mental Health Review Tribunal Pending.” said Theo. “They won’t give me access to my notes, though, which I’m sure would show distorted reporting. Thanks for visiting.”

“That’s okay. You’re not here for long, are you?”

“No, just a month, that’s the most they can legally hold me. Indeed, if they weren’t such sticklers for procedure and justifying their budgets they could release me into the care of my next of kin.”

“Are the other patients hard to look at?”

“Oh, man, I don’t belong next to these people. Manic Depressives are generally upbeat people and you throw that in amongst depressives and schizophrenics and whatever and you get friction. They envy that my condition makes you feel good. In a perfect world they’d have one ward for each condition but that’s never going to happen.”

“Have you had any trouble?”

“Well, I just hide in my room. Of course, the nurses write that down as me being antisocial. I’m not here to make friends, even if I were ill. I’m not allowed a Walkman in case I hang myself on the headphone wire. Even though headphone wire isn’t strong enough for that.”

“What about a book or radio?”

“A radio would disturb the other patients, even though it’d be shut in my room, and then you have a wire again.”

“Batteries?”

“I’d try and eat them. They really do think everyone’s stupid or suicidal in these places.”

“Anything to read?”

“The library here is just endless Mills and Boon and schlock thrillers. No self-help books at all. And the Media room is filled out with violent Videos and DVDs. Work that out, if you can.”

“Theo, I’m so sorry you’re going through this but I will support you at the Tribunal. You’re allowed a friend, aren’t you?”

“Sure, so long as he doesn’t have any sharp edges. Any news on the SETI project?”

“This incident has stalled everything. But don’t blame yourself, like you say we could set up independently on the Internet.”

“Sure. I don’t think there was ever any real intention to release findings. I think that dealing with findings would detract from the endless cycle of lab expansion and equipment requisition.”

“Theo, don’t worry about it.”

“You don’t think I’m getting quality care, do you? It’s impossible to deliver quality care in the brisk interviews they’re constrained to here. But that’s what the PR department will tell you.”

“The rest of your friends, how are they?”

“I don’t know, they’re in another hospital. I hope they don’t feel let down. I know that I’m going to get singled out as a bad influence, then paradoxically they’ll be harangued about not having social lives. Internet Message Boards and House Flashmob Discussion Groups *is* the new social life. These damn Doctors are behind the times. They resent the empowerment. They enjoy it more when they can be paternalistic and dictatorial. What kind of person do you think is attracted to a career in Psychiatry?”

“Yeah, Theo. I’m sure there’re times in every person’s life when he thinks he’s going mad.”

"Well, once you've been made a Psychiatrist who's going to question anything you do? By definition, anything you do must be sane, even medical incompetence. Did you hear about Nidal Malik Hassan over at Fort Hood? He radicalised himself on Al Qaeda message boards and shot nine people, one of whom was pregnant. Physician heal thyself, hey?"

"I suppose we don't have the level of service we pretend to have. It's all overstretched."

"You don't have to tell me. Government doesn't want to be told it's doing a bad job. And do you know they don't care if you take an interest in care issues, if you study psychotherapy? They want the monopoly. They want to say 'Only we can tell you if you feel better. We'll be the judge of that.' At some point you have to ask how healthy it is to want to so callously interfere with someone else's life."

"Some people need it, though."

"I'm not arguing against that. But at the back of it is the assumption that everyone needs to get back on track so they can go on to become millionaires in their field. It's a very controversial and unpatriotic thing to say, but some people do have the right to suicide. And people don't go into Psychiatry because they care, they go there for revenge on their own inner demons. They may not have stood up to the school bully but at least they medicated a schizophrenic. The difference is that the school bully is now a successful White Collar Criminal and the schizophrenic has spent his life harmlessly trying to get on the first rung of the ladder thanks to an unrequested chemical imbalance. You can feel the Schadenfreude oozing out of the staff here."

"Yes, I've heard about this. Occupational Psychopaths. You've probably got a few running this ward."

"And what good would me complaining about any bullying do? I'm crazy, I imagine everything. Bastards!"

"I see they're incredibly out of touch. Most people have Internet Access on the move now and a camera built into their Mobile Phones. That makes life easier for the Disabled and safer for the people who are paranoid about the ill people walking amongst them."

"There has to be more trust and community spirit. I go to festivals, I told you."

“I saw this interesting thing on the TED talks. Apparently our Education system is failing people who have no interest in office life. Think about it, did you have a Dance Class at school? No. And how many people are being labelled ADD and drugged up when they could discover themselves at a more Arts Based School. The pharmaceuticals system is forcing people to miss their calling in life because they sell drugs on the myth that aptitude in classes is the natural state of man. We have a big hangover from the Religion Dominated model that on the one hand refuses to acknowledge biochemical problems exist, and on the other hand refuses to provide a place in society for those who clearly have them. It’s the damn miracle of the Gadarene Pigs every time.”

“The ultimate irony is that if you look up Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in the Diagnostic Manual it says ‘This condition may be adaptive in the academic community’ and neglects to go on to say that every Doctor you meet is a successful Academic!”

“I remember a scene from a Medical Drama where a Doctor was sneaking painkillers and excusing himself by saying ‘This is part of the life’. Typical Sociopathic rationalisation there.”

“Theo, I’m going to have to leave you now. Hopefully we’ll all be able to put this behind us quickly.”

“Yeah.”

Shoshana met Alezar in the car park of the Hospital. She had been putting up Mental Health Rights stickers on some lampposts.

“I feel so sorry for him in there.” she said.

“How did you avoid it?”

“Hid in the bathroom”

“Right place at the wrong time, eh?”

“I know. I hope Theo doesn’t bear me a grudge.”

“He seems to know the process. It’s not despair, it’s resignation. But you’ve got to wonder how many people are killed by indifferent Doctors each year.”

“They are really supercilious. Mine told me not to have children.”

"That's awful. Don't they know we can get on Youtube and slam them now?"

"Well, they tend to club together when there's a complaint. The best you can hope for is a verbal apology. Tell you what, when we get back we'll scour the Web for whistleblower stories and campaign websites. We might even find a Quickstarter site to help us set up our own campaign."

"Uh-oh" said Alezar, "Here comes trouble."

It was the Agent.

"Hi guys, nice to run into you. You know we have you under surveillance, don't you?"

"We're way past caring." said Shoshana. "It's discrimination and a denial of my civil liberties to assume just because I have a condition I'm always suffering from it. I've always been law abiding, no matter what the shrinks say to self-aggrandise their choice of career. Go away and take on the real criminals."

"We do. This isn't a side-line this is one of many operations. But you are going to want to see this." The agent ushered them towards a black van. He slid the door to reveal a bank of monitors.

"This one," he said, "is a feed from a warehouse in Langley. We're starting to see a portal forming."

"Why would you stiffs get contacted?" asked Shoshana.

"We have Psychics of our own, you know? Project Stargate? Better funding than your average hippie enthusiast. No offence."

"Can we actually go there?" Alezar asked. "Seems to me you could rig a monitor to show anything."

"Fine," said the agent. "We're actually sad your man Theo couldn't make it."

"Then spring him," said Shoshana. "You have the authority. Have him discharged into your custody. You may not be his mother but Government Agent counts for something. I'm sharing an apartment with him. Did they contact me? No, I'm probably written into his medical notes as 'an imaginary friend'!"

The van ride over to Langley was an uneventful couple of hours, except for one brief altercation between the Agent and Alezar.

“What do you care about the mentally ill, Alezar? Aren’t you glad they’re out of harm’s way?”

“Not particularly. By all accounts we’re all mentally ill and should all be out of harm’s way. At what point can we live our normal complex lives and not be called mentally ill? Do you think a Sales Rep overselling her product is delusional? Do you think every kid who’s bullied at school deserves the tag ‘delusions of persecution’? The system as it stands defines as normal a very dull, functional, emotionless state of being. Because it’s not run on statistical normality, but middle-class pandering. And in order for it to work it has to hide its failures, oversell its successes and perpetuate itself by spreading out like a virus. Do we hear of Psychiatrists diagnosing themselves, their families? No. And on top of that less dangerous, less debilitating therapies are being swept away because drug therapy is convenient. So I’m concerned because as an average citizen I’m in danger of being swept into the machinery of Big Pharma. I deny I have a Mental Illness and that’s the first symptom they look for.”

The warehouse in Langley was large and ringed with security personnel. The agent waved his pass and he, Alezar and Shoshana were allowed in. There was a bank of computer terminals manned by nervy men wearing headphones. Opposite this was a Perspex screen enclosing half the space in the warehouse. Alezar squinted and noticed a door halfway into the space open, and five civilian dressed characters – were they the Government Psychics the Agent had mentioned? – entered and unfolded some chairs in a circle. After a while a blue mist grew between them and another portal hung in the air.

The Agent ushered over one of the head-phoned personnel.

“Alezar this is Glen. He is trying to make sense of the same SETI data you were working on. Only his team weren’t Channelling, they were remote viewing with maps of the Martian surface. Cydonia, that kind of thing. According to him there’s a large subterranean complex.”

“Nice to meet you,” said Glen. “That’s my Remote Viewing group in there.”

“I’m just a desk jockey,” said Alezar. “I’m surprised by all this psychic stuff, frankly.”

“Well, you get used to it. What was it Clarke said? Sufficiently Advanced Technology looks like magic?”

“Yep, he also ‘invented’ satellites.”

“Our psychic project remit is frustrating. The return on investing in Psychic Training is minimal, but we can’t afford to be without that minimal edge. For every ten projects we run, eight fail. And it doesn’t hurt our mystique in the eyes of the enemy.”

“Well, it seems you’ve finally caught the eye of Otherworldly Forces. They’re going to want their answer: are we friend or foe?”

Alezar looked out to the group encircling the portal. One of them touched a headset. The desk speaker sounded out.

“Glen, we’re being invited in, do we go?”

“Okay, slowly, one of you go in. Maintain the group bond.” Glen leaned across to Alezar “There’s no group bond, that’s one of our teambuilding lies!”

The group seemed to hold a vote, and tallied a raising of hands. Then one surprisingly old man gathered himself together, stood up, and walked into the blue light.

“Can you hear him still?” asked Alezar.

“Yes,” said Glen. “He says he’ll have to break communications while the Aliens brief him. It could be hours before he’s sent back.”

“Glen, I’m Shoshana” she introduced herself. “One of my friends is being held in a mental institution for holding ideas that you’re actively encouraging here. Do you think you could secure his release? For the sake of principle, you know?”

“No, he could really be crazy.”

“But you admit it’s not a crazy life-pursuit? Interesting.”

“You mean Theo, don’t you? When we’re training Psychic Soldiers, New Earth Army, First Earth Battalion or whatever, one of our techniques is on bluffing your

way out of confrontations with officials. Your friend was too much the giddy amateur, if you want my opinion."

"Does he deserve to be drugged forever for that?"

"Well, there's that Aesop's Fable about the Crane among the Storks, isn't there?"

"Oh, to hell with you."

"That's right. Another damned government agent."

"Doesn't it also seem too damn convenient to you that we're all indoctrinated into some religion or other from birth, and typically rebel out of it at adolescence? At which time the psychiatrists dive in and look for signs of religious mania so they can be seen to be doing their jobs? How else are you going to lose your faith except in a thwarted act of religious mania? Alongside the idea that if you think you're healthy you must be ill, don't you see that no-one can escape a diagnosis?"

"Do you want to live in anarchy?"

"No, but it's incommensurable. Either have a religious society with no medication or a secular society with no religious hogwash. Don't try and play them off each other. Do you know how it feels to be a creative child with an active mind to be told your compulsive reading, note-taking or whatever other creative activities are actually a disease? Instead you could have a two-tier educational system with some people being driven toward professions that better accommodate their symptoms, instead of leaving them dependant on the Welfare System. And with every kid you've turned into a pill-popper you've replaced a possible future Mozart, Einstein or I M Pei, with a sullen, defeated couch potato."

"I can speechify too, you know. Arts Careers and Academic Careers are very hard to get off the ground. Do you want an economy based on encouraging people into lost causes?"

"Well, they're not so much lost causes now; everyone can crowd fund their dreams on the Internet these days. You're a dinosaur. What's the point of having a raft of symptoms that don't take into account a new generation that can educate itself with greater efficiency than did the generation that invented the syndromes in the first place?"

“But that’s just going to give you a factory ethos culture. I don’t think that’s what God had in mind.”

“Oh, now you get Messianic? You think we didn’t have ethics before we had Gods? One civilisation’s religion is the next civilisation’s literary entertainment. And here we are, about to be shredded as a useless diversion to these Aliens, if we’re not careful.”

Alezar decided it was time to butt in “Our friend Theo says that the Aliens have been building up an antagonism since projects like ours, like yours, typically cold-shoulder them.”

“What do you expect me to do?” asked Glen.

“Give us access to the portal.”

“Yes,” said Shoshana. “I’ll bet your volunteer is equipped with a very underwhelming script to greet the Aliens with. We can conjure something more vivacious.”

“I’m sorry,” said Glen. “I can’t allow that, I’m closely monitored.”

Shoshana turned on the agent and railed at him: “What exactly was the point of bringing us along?”

“The least I could do was let you observe. I’m sorry but our syllabus is very rigorous and you would not be considered as part of a delegation.”

“Oh, I know what that means. Your damn course hinges on driving the will out of everyone, not self-empowerment.”

“If you’ve had enough I can transport you back off the base.”

Alezar took Shoshana aside and whispered “Don’t blow this, we might be able to glean something from being flies on the wall. Who knows?”

“I just keep thinking of Theo and how he’d be thrilled at the opportunity. They’ve got people on this project who think Alien Contact is as significant as feeding the cat.”

“Well, then we owe him a full report on the big day, don’t we?”

Glen was back to staring across at the portal. The elderly man had re-emerged. The rest of the circle gave him a subdued clap as he resumed his seat.

“What have you got for us, Trent?” asked Glen.

“The beings want to know if we’re aware that a data package received by the Ohio Radio Telescope is encoded with data on how to build several sustainable and safe energy sources. They’re curious as, apparently, they’ve sent this packet periodically in the past and have seen no effect.”

“Thanks Trent. If it’s no trouble, go back in there and tell them it’s against our customs to accept a civilizational hand up the ladder like that.”

“This is exactly what I was afraid of,” said Shoshana. “You’re going to set them off. They’ll see this as wilful ignorance, a snub.”

“I’m sorry, I can’t vary from approved procedure” said Glen, as Trent started off for the portal again.

Theo’s weeks in the mental institution looked set to pass slowly. His lawyer had advised him to sit quietly and spend most of his time in his room, except for meals and the drug round. That way there was a chance the staff might clue in to the fact that he was out of place, too well behaved to be on a ward with loud, violent people. Of course, they might assume he was only quiet and well behaved because he was drugged up, not because it was typically his personality. Mood disorder, he brooded. Anything to sell more pills. His lawyer had said comforting things about the upcoming Mental Health Review Tribunal, that he was of good character and that would stand in his favour. That he could substantiate some of the stuff that overenthusiastic staff would have written down as delusions.

Mostly he brooded over missed opportunities in his education. There were plenty of moments when he could have launched as something creative, but had felt obligated to chase down some technical qualification instead. His father had guilted him into regarding creative careers as effeminate. Plus, he brooded, education was infested with a religious imperative not so much to identify the talented, but to discipline the herd through fear. Every morning he’d tolerated the assembled school droning the Lord’s Prayer. It was an insult to his

intelligence, though he understood it was well-intentioned. It was just that he was smart enough to know that the bullies were smart enough to disregard it as well. The result was a warzone in the playground, where any slights or tortures were disregarded since “God wouldn’t allow such travesties” as someone’s sweet little darling driving another to suicide.

Yes, the God problem. Religious feeling, he’d found out, was considered a symptom of his condition. Also, there was a chaplain at the hospital. If he asked to see this chaplain he’d get told his condition was getting worse! But were any of these concerned Psychiatrists active in discouraging superstition in the young? No. Bad for business. Theo amused himself imagining a Chinese Wall between the Clergy and the Pharmaceutical Companies; one lot broke their minds and the other lot fixed them up.

Then there was the Evolution Argument. The changes in society over the last seventy years had led to an exponential pressure on what was still, in the case of the human animal, essentially a stone age creature. There should be no shame in cracking under the influence of a high tech world; the high tech world was too new an evolutionary pressure for anyone to be able to cope with yet. Except the lucky mutant few, of course.

And the final ironic twist of the Mental Illness conundrum was that it was increasingly well-known that Psychopathy or Sociopathy was the Mental Illness that helped you get ahead. You’d be cold, unempathetic due to an underactive limbic system, but this would help you ruthlessly charge to the top. And in the workaday world who’d notice an emotionless wolf in sheep’s clothing when all emotion was meant to be suppressed?

And was Psychiatry really something out there in the world, competent and ready to leap into action? Or was it hunched and corrupt, hiding in offices, accepting kickbacks and plea-bargaining?

How much longer can I stare at the wall, wondered Theo. How long can I play host to these unwholesome gripes and grudges?

He rolled impatiently and looked around his room. There was a slide door to the en-suite shower and toilet, and apart from the bed just a desk. Ironically, there were plug fittings, even though wires were forbidden.

Suddenly, the blue hazy light emerged again, this time in the middle of the wall.

“Theo,” a voice called. “Theo, we need you.”

Theo steeled himself and stepped through the portal. The Aliens had brought him into a habitat he assumed was on the Moon. One was towered over him now.

“Why have our messages gone ignored?”

“They’re too proud to admit of your existence.”

“Why should this be?”

“We know from examples in our history, when cultures have clashed, that things go very badly for the non-dominant culture. The Conquistadores. The John From cargo cult. And so we’d rather go on pretending you’re not real than deal with it at last.”

“But your planet is sickening from environmental and economic calamities. We could make things so much better for you. How can you refuse us?”

“We consider the environmental and economic problems contained, at least we have the ability to contain it in the minds of the populace. Propaganda and such. And a prevailing philosophy amongst us is that suffering and inequality is compensated for after death.”

“You speak of religion. Surely this does not still persist?”

“To an embarrassing degree, I’m afraid it does. I do think it possible that were you to force your charity upon them, they’d declare war on you for depriving them of their right to suffering. It wouldn’t surprise me. The rational element of our being is rather new, evolutionarily speaking.”

“Our plans for you as they stand are to upload the consciousnesses of the intelligent inhabitants of your planet onto a computer substrate. This negates the ethical implications of annihilating your planet for the Galactic greater good.”

“You’re going to wipe us out?”

“Only in physical form. Your consciousness will have a simulated existence in our computer banks and will never know the difference. Surely you comprehend the ethics of a pre-emptive strike? Your wayward species reaching out into the

universe with its notions of Nuclear Weapons, Pollution and Economic
Subjugation cannot be tolerated."

"Aren't you subjugating us right now?"

"We have that right, we have mastered our baser natures."

"Those baser natures include the evolutionary drives that permit the eventual development of higher, aesthetic states of being. Surely you see the hypocrisy here?"

"Do you see the hypocrisy of appealing to evolutionary standards when you'd clearly stand to lose? We've given you every chance to forge an alliance and at every decision point you've turned us away. Tunguska, Roswell, Rendlesham, the list goes on. Your policy is to snub us."

"Yes, but can you see how demoralising accepting your help would be? From that point on our history, our climb out of the Dark Ages, would be dwarfed by your own incomprehensible advances from even further into the past. If we deny you then at least we can live with ourselves."

"You wouldn't be doing that for long."

Abstract

The focus of this research is “the Genre of Science Fiction in the Embodiment of Mental Illness Issues”. Such a study is important to decrease stigma of and challenge public misconceptions about the Mentally Ill. The research approach adopted in this dissertation includes a critical reading of literary theorists whose concerns put Mental Illness representation and the dignity of science fiction to the fore. The findings from this study provide evidence that there is a narrative to be found between many commentators that cautiously promote Mental Illness rights and embody the dilemmas mental ill people face through metaphor and analogy in Science Fiction. The main conclusions drawn from this study are that the tools for addressing this issue are there for the taking and that the rewards of writing in support of this issue are not insubstantial. This dissertation recommends that aspiring science fiction enthusiasts can invigorate their writing routine by encoding the struggles of mentally ill people into their narratives, alongside any other struggles.

Keywords: Science Fiction, Mental Illness, Stigma, Discrimination, Science Fantasy

Introduction

This study is contextualised by the present and continuing efforts of writers to achieve dignity for sufferers of Mental Illness. The contemporary scene has never been more well-informed and sympathetic, yet the self-esteem and courage necessary to join the onslaught has to derive from somewhere; and there should be a preparatory narrative to newcomers to the controversy, a discourse more elevated than hearsay and urban myth. And so a Mental Illness sufferer who feels they have a lot to offer by turning their career to writing science fiction should feel emboldened while discovering that there is a critical tradition ready to welcome their efforts, and this dissertation attempts to consolidate and communicate this enthusiasm.

Chapter One

The Genre of Science Fiction

Science Fiction has been identified as early as the 2nd Century and is characterised by a rational writing tone, in contrast to fantasy fiction which has settings and characters seen as beyond the realm of the possible. Typically the setting will be futuristic, and the tone will be either optimistic, "Utopian", or pessimistic, "Dystopian". Science Fiction stories tend to take an issue of the times and extrapolate upon it to serve as a morality or cautionary tale. Popular themes at the moment are overpopulation, environmental disaster and the acceleration of technological culture. This can be contrasted with a work such as "Gulliver's Travels" (Swift, 1892) where the preoccupations of the author revolve around the hypocrisies of politicians and the absurdities of everyday life; clearly Jonathan Swift's fury had to be more constrained by his culture, as the satire is deeply buried.

There have been milestones in the evolution of the Science Fiction genre. When Isaac Asimov developed the "Three Laws of Robotics", this proved so influential that practically every robot story harks back to it, affectionately, as a kind of shorthand. There are other prolific writers, such as Larry Niven, who create worlds and then allow other writers to fill in the details with stories of their own. Larry Niven likens this to writing a "round robin" letter. Or "creating a playground", in the case of the Ringworld Novels(Niven, 1980) , and then "leaving the gate open".

In contrast to other genres, Science Fiction leans overtly towards the philosophical. It is hard to imagine Ayn Rand finding another genre for "Atlas Shrugged"(Rand, 1957), or George Orwell another genre for "1984"(Orwell, 1949); these are not novels written primarily for the pleasure of innovation and

escapism. And even in the case of the more Space-Opera style works, there is still an aspirational thread running through the work, a sense of struggling towards a new perspective on an old problem. Iain M Banks created an arena for his characters that is delightfully intricate and glowingly described, but at the same time he takes the trouble to infuse a political commentary into the heart of his "Culture" novels(Banks, 1987) , though with a lighter touch than the aforementioned polemical novels. Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged", though influential, is often criticised for being shrill and monotonous.

B F Skinner, the behavioural scientist, fictionalized his ideas to better explore them in "Walden Two" (Skinner, 1948). Having invoked Henry David Thoreau's contemplative mood regarding the human condition with the title, Skinner proceeded to then add his own personal contribution in the form of a psychologically oriented society. Reflecting on the success of "Walden Two" in the commentary to the 1976 edition, Skinner reflects that "the 'behavioural engineering' I had so frequently mentioned in the book was, at the time, little more than science fiction" and later Skinner starts to see predictions made in "Walden Two" coming alive in the 50s in the form of therapeutic communities for the mentally ill that utilised behaviour modification and token economies. I bring up B F Skinner as an influence on my work because my earlier successful studies have been in Psychology. It is intriguing for a fan to see his influence into the present day; not many people would notice the choice of the name "Frasier" for the psychiatrist in the television comedy series(Filmography) as significant, unless they knew the protagonist of "Walden Two" was called "Frazier" and had that deeper level of appreciation as a result.

So Science Fiction has been characterised by its tone, which is rational to distinguish it from Fantasy Fiction, and by its themes, which are typically an extrapolation of a current social dilemma to an uncomfortable extreme. This extreme is then either contained and resolved, or overwhelms the protagonists in an apocalyptic cautionary tale.

The characters of Science Fiction are: humans, humans with advanced capabilities - either from bioengineered cybernetics or from evolved capacities of mind - then robots and finally aliens. If skilfully dealt with, Science Fiction can encompass ghosts too, as seen in Catharine Asaro's books dealing with Death technologies(Asaro, 2000), or the "Sublimed" Citizens of Iain M Banks' "the Culture" who have designed a real technological version of heaven.

The place of Science Fiction in the Philosophic tradition cannot be underestimated. Whatever one feels about Ayn Rand as an unsympathetic icon, it was through her Science Fiction that she was able to ease herself into the American Consciousness as a Social Commentator, with influence felt to this day. George Orwell's dystopia is still invoked, as are the dystopias of Aldous Huxley (Huxley, 1932), Ray Bradbury (Bradbury, 1953) and Anthony Burgess (Burgess, 1962). Ray Bradbury tellingly once remarked of *Fahrenheit 451* "I wasn't trying to predict the future, I was trying to prevent it" (Wall Street Journal 2003 John Miller interview, see [Linkography](#)). The shop-worn, second-hand paperback may easily be any young person's first introduction to philosophical discourse by use of metaphor.

The luminaries of Science Fiction feel such an affection towards their genre and their fanbase that they will write screeds on how to be a better writer, imitation being a sincere form of flattery. Isaac Asimov wrote a poem "The Foundations of SF Success" (Asimov, 1954): "And all the fans will say,/As you walk your spatial way,/If that young man indulges in flights through all/the Galaxy, why, what a most imaginative type of man that type/of man must be."

Larry Niven has a set of Laws called "Niven's Laws" (Niven, 1984) which charmingly begins with the admonition "Never throw shit at an armed man; never stand next to someone who's throwing shit at an armed man". Niven's laws relate to his idea of World building, with other similarly humorous invocations of common sense like "Never fire a laser at a mirror", and illustrate his personal belief that "an armed society is a polite society". Later in the Chapter he has a smaller list of laws just for writers, with encouraging statements like "Never be ashamed of what you write", "Writers who write for other writers should write letters" and "Books that set out to be the last word on the subject, aren't".

Bob Shaw, famous for holding a world record for the anthologisation of his short story "Other Days, Other Eyes" and for winning the Hugo Award twice, has a "How to" book for Science Fiction Writers (Shaw, 1993) in which he warns against the simple ruse of elevating a well-known folktale to the level of science fiction by merely dropping in some trappings like changing the setting to a colony on Mars and having everyone holding a zap gun. He grudgingly admits to having almost got away with this himself in the form of a boxing story where a talented psychic boxer owes his success to a brain mutation. Angry at his unfair

advantage, his opponents corner him in an alley and scrape away the extra lobe of his skull. A critic recognised this as the “oldest boxing story ever told”, where a boxer that was considered talented to a threatening degree would be mobbed and then taken somewhere dark and nasty to have his hands broken with bricks.

Isaac Asimov has a collection of anecdotes entitled “Asimov Laughs Again”(Asimov, 1992), in which he tells of a confrontation with an aspiring writer after one of his lectures. Asimov is famous for being astonishingly prolific, with 70 books at just one of his five publishers. This aspiring writer told of how he had started out and had to face a gruelling round of rejection, and sought solace in other writers who told him this was quite normal. Asimov nodded and the aspirant went on about how he then became more established, but found himself beset by self-doubt and writers’ block, and his writer friends told him that this, too, was quite normal. At this point the aspiring writer could barely contain himself, as he seethed at Asimov: “But you, Mr. Asimov, I’m convinced there’s something wrong with you!”

Ray Bradbury’s Zen in the Art of Writing (Bradbury, 1992) advises “Don’t think” as the important mantra; allow your story to have its own life, to develop organically. And Bradbury eschews artistic pretension, saying that aesthetics is a house that has a “room for every horror, every delight”. Bradbury seems to rejoice in the creative act over content, “I ask for no happy endings” he says “only for proper endings based on proper assessments of energy contained and [then] given detonation”. Bradbury, in giving writerly advice, seems to be on a less commercial wavelength than Stephen King, who brusquely says “talent is as cheap as table salt, what really wins out is hard work” and further disillusioned his fans by saying “If you can pay an electricity bill with a short story you have my respect”. Bradbury would have you be free to explore your whimsy, would have you, by contrast, consider yourself a successful writer even if you’re never published.

The Inspiring collection of essays “Living with a writer”, edited by Dale Salwak, has the essay “Hong Kong Time”(Salwak, 2004), which seems closest to the sensibilities of the Sci Fi writer, advocating the writer pursuing a double life, getting a great deal of work and research done in the early hours while one’s significant other contributes towards the home during the day. Elsewhere in this text, the ghost of Agatha Christie is invoked, who, while not being otherworldly in her choice of genre, still has the inspiring advice “I assumed the burden of a

profession; to write whether I felt like it or not, and even when what I was writing was not particularly good."

I did want to deal with Whitley Strieber's own unique approach to Writer's Block and Creative Endeavour. Whitley Strieber started out as a novelist of modest repute with his books "Wolfen" and "The Hunger", but then came to widespread notice with his claims that he had been abducted by aliens. Though "Communion" is the most well-known of these works, there is actually a whole series: "Communion"(Strieber, 1987), "Transformation"(Strieber, 1988), "Breakthrough"(Strieber, 1997), "Confirmation", and the fascinating "The Secret School". This is a remarkable instance of a writer either being an outright fraud and maintaining a calm façade; or this is a body of work from someone in the grip of something beyond his power that nevertheless looks fraudulent (or paranormal depending on your mood). Certainly he was able to find his public, as shown in the outpouring of similar alien abduction stories collected in "The Communion Letters"(Striebers, 1997). So whether this was a spiritual epiphany or evidence of some kind of hallucinatory disorder, Strieber seems to have found a way ahead in his professional life with an earnest tone and a willingness to take on controversial subject matter. It is interesting to note that "Majestic" is not one of his Alien Abduction books, but a "fictionalisation" of what he claims as the real story of the Roswell Incident, that "had to be written as a novel". Of further interest is a paragraph in Strieber's "2012, the War for Souls"(Strieber, 2007), where he sets up his main character as a writer, then has that writer confess that a work of his that fabricated real-life events and named his own family as participants was "the story of a man losing his mind in public"; strangely familiar. It's also little known that Strieber's book "The Coming Global Superstorm" was a straight-down-the-line work of non-fictional environmentalism in collaboration with Art Bell, that was later adapted into the film "The Day After Tomorrow". So Strieber is something of an enigma to science fiction fans and many have disowned him.

Science Fiction, as with any genre, has its fringe dwellers. So it is only appropriate to briefly discuss the impact of L Ron Hubbard. L Ron Hubbard has created a furtive association for Science Fiction writers; while the subject matter is Utopian and the research material concerns the interaction of Science and the Human Condition, L Ron Hubbard went the final mile and actually set out to change things. "Dianetics" was published in an issue of "Astounding" magazine

(Hubbard, 1950) and was seized upon as an authentic piece of social research, even though its provenance was poor and its references were non-existent. From there, there grew up the monolithic Church of Scientology which still brainwashes people and subjugates their lives and divests them of their money and property with chilling efficiency. Sadly, as a cover for their destructivity, the Church of Scientology has a front called the CCHR(Citizens Commission on Human Rights), which purports to stand up for the rights of “victims” of Psychiatry; the fact that it tries to exploit such victims into trying Scientology muddies the waters both for Psychiatry honestly practised, and for authentic campaigners trying to improve Psychiatry.

Holly Lisle has a page on her blog which interestingly tries to talk her writing students out of “trying to change the world.” Remember L Ron Hubbard, she admonishes, remember Mein Kampf(Lisle, 2013 in Linkography). Think of the damage Genghis Khan would have done if he had been able to write.

Chapter Two

Archetypes of Science Fiction

Science Fiction is characterised by archetypal characters and settings which create a heightened sense of the escapism of any genre. Robots and cyborgs are often introduced to criticise aspects of the human condition that are taken for granted. In Philip K Dick's "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep", (Dick, 1968) for instance, a test has to be developed to identify rogue Androids. The Voigt-Kampf test involves a test of empathy, focusing on involuntary emotional responses to a set of questions. However, in this setting Androids have been pitted against humans only because their design allows them to develop emotional responses over three years, and thus they are redesigned to only live three years.

Similarly, in "The Caves of Steel" (Asimov, 1954) by Isaac Asimov the robot R Daneel Olivaw is gifted as a partner to an Earth Policeman, Elijah Baley, to assist in the investigation of a Spacer's(a Spacer is a more advanced human, visiting from an off-planet colony) murder. Elijah has to overcome his revulsion at what he originally sees as a threat to his profession, and has to grudgingly accept that Daneel is an advanced enough simulacrum to have the same clearances Elijah has, to perform the same role. Elijah wastes half his time on the investigation trying to prove that Daneel is too perfect a robot and must in fact be an imposter implicated in the murder, such is Elijah's antipathy. Asimov's characters here show attitudes analogous to the dilemmas of the Civil Rights movement of the time.

The archetype of the Alien again criticises the human condition, but the distinction creates an interesting change of scope. The robot archetype implies issues we bring on ourselves through design or social convention; the robot is metaphorically a child of mankind. The alien archetype implies a bond of organic destiny in any analogies the writer plans to draw; the Alien is cousin to Mankind, and therefore may be its fearful superior. In Stanislaw Lem's "Solaris"(Lem, 1961), Kelvin, a Psychiatrist, is called to a research station on the eponymous planet to investigate the apparent breakdown of his friend Gibarian, hinted at by a cryptic transmission. When he arrives Gibarian is dead, another crew member has vanished and the other crew members are shifty and paranoid. It emerges that they are haunted by embodiments of people from their past, generated by the intelligent ocean that covers the planet. Kelvin himself is plagued by a simulacrum of his wife, who committed suicide on Earth years previously. Kelvin finds that it is impossible to draw the other crew out of their depressing

rehearsal of long overdue negotiation with the past. He also loses the ability to disengage himself emotionally from his own simulacrum, his suicidal wife. A more level headed member of the crew eventually develops a way to sever Solaris' influence over them and saves the crew, but the mystery of what Solaris was is left open: an evolved Alien trying to soothe its guests, a malicious force trying to drive interlopers to despair; and Kelvin is left wondering if encountering Solaris is comparable to encountering God. A "non-interventionist" God; and so the author uses the genre to inspire oceanic feelings in the reader, the much neglected spiritual impact that Science Fiction can have.

Another archetype of Science Fiction is the Man or Woman with powers. A recent example is Audrey Niffenegger's Time Traveller in "The Time-Traveller's Wife" (Niffenegger, 2003). Here the power of time travel is introduced as the result of a genetic anomaly similar to epilepsy which disjoins Henry from his place in the space time continuum. Although the scientific basis for the character may be implausible, the story nevertheless becomes an enchanting metaphor of a romance that overcomes absenteeism, distance and social propriety; Henry is forever taken away by his time-travelling episodes and so the relationship invokes the yearning in the real life dilemmas of Army Wives, those in arranged marriages and people overcoming obstacles to partnering in the form of physical or mental disabilities. Henry's power, though, is unusual for a science fiction narrative in that he has no control over it. It merely steps in and takes him to a different time; though he is able to put this to his advantage by noticing stock market movements and lottery numbers, and then using the information. This makes the mental illness metaphor here more appealing, as sufferers can easily relate to episodes of lost control, whether this is intentional in Niffenegger's novel or not.

It is interesting to compare Henry in the "Time Traveller's Wife" with the protagonist of a straight-fiction story "Mr Jones" (see Filmography), where the main character is coming to terms with Bipolar Disorder in a very run-of-the-mill setting. He is shown having a delusional episode on the top of the scaffolding at the building site where he works. He is shown strapped down in a mental hospital waiting for his preferred doctor to show up, and acquiesces to being sedated by her. Eventually they forge a relationship and manage to work around his episodes. This is all very informative, but not as gripping as a narrative that is driven by novelty and wonder. "Mr Jones" would be watched dutifully by those

undergoing the dilemma, but for those unaffected, those who need to be reached by a non-stigma message, it offers so little and thus is too easy to ignore.

In John Wyndham's short story "The Third Vibrator" (Wyndham, 1938) the inventor of a superweapon is forced, through some kind of benign cosmic intervention, to regress into the lifetimes of great fictitious inventors of the past, from Lemuria and then further back to Atlantis, to feel the same dilemma as it played out for them. Seized with guilt, the moment he returns to the present he destroys the prototypes in his workshop and prevents the development of such dreadful technology in the modern age. The story ends with him mournfully celebrating his success from a room in an asylum, with a fellow academic trying to defend his story and decisions. Here mental illness, the grandiose delusion or paranoid fantasy, is invoked as the conceit of a morality tale. The inventor may well have had a real spiritual experience, he may not. His colleagues argue his moral stance speaks of sanity, the hospital orderlies cannot accept his narrative.

Frank Herbert's Dune saga is monumental for its recognition among science fiction fans. Frank Herbert confides in an anecdote in "Dreamer of Dune" (Herbert, 2004) that he had a bet with Robert Heinlein and L Ron Hubbard over who could best create a convincing religion. Heinlein wrote "Stranger in a Strange Land" (Heinlein, 1961), Hubbard wrote "Dianetics" and Herbert wrote "Dune" (Herbert, 1965). For all its complexity and heart, Dune attracted criticism for being old fashioned, gothic and misogynistic; a subplot involves an organisation called The Bene Gesserit Sisterhood which engages in eugenics, training its members to be concubines for use as political pawns, ultimately to produce a super being they call the Kwisatz Haderach. Members of this sisterhood use psychological warfare and ritually imbibe poisons. Paul Atreides is the Kwisatz Haderach but seeks to cut his own destiny among the Fremen of desert planet Arrakis after his family are ousted in a coup.

But in a fascinating twist, the narrative of Paul Muad' dib finding sympathy with the Fremen of Arrakis - and fighting the Galactic Emperor and the Harkonnen for control of the Spice - reached out into the real world recently in the form of an underground filmmaker John Anthony Hill (See Linkography) who took on the name "Muad'dib" to highlight his similarly Messianic Mission to disseminate his documentary "The Ripple Effect", which proposes that the 7/7 London bombings were "a false flag operation". An incident such as this, and the description of the

similarly grandiose stain Scientology left on Science Fiction, is included to acknowledge that there is a contrast to the drive of this thesis; sometimes Science Fiction propagates or attracts a negative message when it comes to mental illness; Hill was extradited to the UK and charged with perverting the course of justice, and grandiosely identifies himself as “The Messiah” on his website.

Philip K Dick often wrestles with mental illness themes as he was an active member of Californian subculture. In “A Scanner Darkly” (Dick, 1977) he confesses that he saw his fellow travellers falling to the various mental illnesses that beset recreational drug users “like the child playing in traffic who notices his friends being struck down, one by one”. Though it is debateable whether Philip K Dick’s nostalgia is admirable - “Their only crime was to play” - his perspective is valuable nonetheless.

In “Valis” (Dick, 1981) Philip K Dick fictionalises an encounter with the paranormal he believes he had. He describes an information satellite beaming information into his brain with a pink light. Throughout the narrative Dick “gains some much needed objectivity” by giving the narrator the name “Horselover Fat”, a transliteration of the phonemes of his own name from Greek into English. The narrative of “Valis” concerns friendships forged in therapy sessions, good-humoured attempts to talk people out of suicide, and finding a universal meaning in a cut-price film festival in order to drag one’s self-esteem higher. It is a gritty survivalist tale of a man, shorn of meaning and self-worth in the psychiatric system, trying to find a new identity through a proficiency in the symbolic systems of New Age thinking.

In “Martian Time-Slip” (Dick, 1964), the character with powers is an autistic child who can use his over-intense introspection of his past to bring about time-travel. However, the introduction of this character to the narrative suggests a limited understanding of autism: “he became autistic, what choice did he have?”, as though it is merely a matter of circumstance and not a combination of circumstance and a genetic condition (Zelan, 2004).

In “The Psychopath Test”, Jon Ronson (Ronson, 2011) compares psychopaths to alien beings, bereft as they are of human empathy due to abnormally low-functioning of the amygdala. They seem to walk among us in disguise, as do the “Pod People” in “Invasion of the Body Snatchers”. In a broader example, the late

Iain M Banks (Banks, 2004) describes in “The Algebraist” a society of intelligent dirigible-like beings living in the atmosphere of a gas giant planet. These creatures live inordinately long lives and consider themselves so successful and cultured that they develop a cruel tradition of schooling whereby they actively hunt and eat their own offspring in order to improve the upcoming generation. A researcher of “The Dwellers”, having published about their alarming tradition, lives in regret since his report inspired human educators to devise the occasional suicide-inducing “Severity Schools”. This is mirrored in real life by the ruthless lives of psychopaths who, surprisingly, do not have to be violent to earn the title. Jon Ronson’s journalistic narrative leads him to anonymous sources in government who worry over their own detachment, a community of factory workers laid off by a callous stroke of the pen and a disruptive translator and biochemist who inveigles his way into the lives of a number of academics by gifting them an ornate self-published book and then telling them to “wait for a sign”. Jon Ronson puts forth the worrying proposition that psychopaths, through their unsettling ability to charm people and through their doggedness, probably have an inordinate amount of influence over society.

Walter John Williams’ short story “Dinosaurs” (Williams, 1987) makes this point well, concerning as it does a gigantic alien being visiting an alien race of minute stature. Both races lay claim to intelligence, technology and shared cultural concern, but the visiting giant is so cosseted by the technology of his spaceship that he evinces psychopathic disregard when he blunderingly steps on a habitat of the smaller race of aliens, killing them all. He offhandedly apologizes, but cannot see “the tragedy of it”, as he is used to a technology that replaces broken things, and even broken people, without much fuss. To him, the unique sacrosanct quality of a person’s individuality has ceased to have any worth.

Damon Knight’s “In the Country of the Kind”(Knight, 1956) deals with the notion of a society that has so medicated and pacified its populace that the last known psychopath is treated openly not as a threat, but more as a figure of ridicule or a political reactionary; they simply ignore him, as the technology of the day diffuses any danger he represents. He is marked with genetic modification to alert people to his presence by a change in the air, and his interactions with people become pleading and one-sided, as he tries to convince them that their passivity represents a loss to the spectrum of human emotions.

Similarly “Lot” by Ward Moore (Moore, 1953) follows the story of a man trying to aid his family in an escape from his city during a time of severe upheaval. He has a meticulous plan to beat the traffic, but is stalled at every juncture by the emotional demands of his family, who cannot see the reality of the crisis. In the end he convinces his wife, dog and son to leave his truck for a rest break, then he dispassionately drives away with only his daughter and a hoard of supplies. There is a knowing, agnostic nod to the Biblical inspiration of this story in its title, the protagonist “Mr Jimmon” has the selfishness of Lot in his metaphorically choosing lush lands over desert lands(Genesis 13.5-13); and the author presents a case in favour of Lot’s decision and attitude.

Chapter Three

Current Dilemmas of Mental Illness

Most of the campaigning around Mental Illness focusses on reduction of stigma. It is only as recently as 2013 (Linkography)that Mental Illness was decreed as of equal importance as physical illness, in order to address the marked underfunding the NHS receives for Mental Illness Care Provision.

Sadly, it is ingrained in the culture to be suspicious of outsiders. On an evolutionary level, we seem to have a predisposition or “preparedness” towards certain phobias(Seligman, 1971). Similarly, there is a rich folk tradition of morality tales where an outsider is identified and routed. And this can clearly not

always be thought of as a bad thing. However, our progression as a society is far outstripping a naïve contemplation of the world. The Evolutionary psychologists would observe that contemporary society resembles “a waking dreamer, caught between the fantasies of sleep and the chaos of the real world. The mind seeks but cannot find the precise place and hour. We have created a Star Wars civilization, with Stone Age emotions, medieval institutions, and godlike technology”(Wilson, 2013).

Furthermore, the old narrative of the madman who must be driven to the edge of the village and stoned to death no longer applies. In its place we have media hysteria over the mental health issue, where the fear of mentally ill people has made them convenient scapegoats for the crimes caused by thrill-seekers (Linkography). Plus there is the pleasure of schadenfreude when, for instance, hearing of a celebrity who has developed symptoms. And further to the folk narrative there is also the influence of the Christian segment of society, who have a process of their own, “Deliverance”, to attempt to contain mental illness, or “demonic possession” as they call it(Kelsey, 1961). This is still surprisingly widespread and involves an enthusiastic interpretation of several Bible verses.

Religiosity is itself a symptom of several different conditions and there are other psychiatric symptoms, such as hearing voices, which line up with a religious outlook on life. The recovered sufferer of a mental illness has had sufficient episodes to motivate regular obedience to a medication regimen, and so will have made peace with knowing that chemicals affect the inner soul and that Religion is probably unreliable. This is disillusioning and disenfranchises the sufferer from any friends who do have faith, as it is an obstacle to non-argumentative conversation. Further, as bad luck would have it, the notion of mental illness can line up with ideas in spiritual culture of sin or bad karma. Add to this the need for applying for a special driving license, days off work for doctor's appointments and the frustrations of the inadequacies of the NHS driving many sufferers to the private sector, and there is a lot to alienate a sufferer and provide stumbling blocks in job interviews and social events.

The real landmark of Mental Illness being recognised in Popular Culture for all the wrong reasons was the film “Silence of the Lambs”(Filmography), which dramatized the Thomas Harris novel(Harris, 1988). The notion of Psychological Profiling is actually highly controversial(Ronson, 2011) , but the film nonetheless confers a cosy sense that the Serial Killer in our midst can be easily winkled out

of hiding with the same toolkit *Sherlock Holmes* had in Baker Street; overly simplifying the forensic science and foregrounding intuition. Actual revelations in the press speak of horrific crimes going unnoticed for decades, and often only coming to light through a fluke. It underlines something the movies never address; there are more movies than there are killers for there to be movies about. The fear of the social problem becomes a lot more poisonous than the social problem itself. And it is a laudable plan; make the evil element in our society feel outgunned, by all means, but acknowledge that harmless people are being tarred with the same brush.

Having been diagnosed, having adapted to taking medication, sufferers have to live with the stigma of the label “Mentally Ill” for life. There are campaigns to counter this, but it is a lamentably new initiative to introduce teaching Mental Health issues to schoolchildren. And so playground politics extend into the adult world, and sufferers find themselves being shunned. With saddening predictability, reports of children being bullied until they commit suicide on Facebook have become commonplace([Linkography](#)); there is even a “game” on Facebook where one can apply an amateurish diagnosis on all one’s friends for the sake of a quick laugh. This diminishes the urgency of the realities sufferers face and perpetuates the myth that people with illnesses have character flaws or weak wills when in fact their conditions are the result of factors beyond their control.

In the Creative Segment my protagonist “Theo” is confronted with the dilemma that he must stand up for the truth he bears witness to, even though it makes him look like he’s having a relapse. This corresponds to the dilemma that sufferers face when returning to work; if they disclose their condition they appear honest, yet raise questions about their reliability; and if they hide their condition their merits will come to the fore, but any resurgence of their condition will make them appear to be dishonest and deceptive. This is a Catch-22 (Heller, 1961) and creates the appearance of malingering, so is not met with sympathy from healthcare professionals. Though there is hope in the form of recruiters who specialise in taking on board sufferers with their specific needs, this leads to a feeling of defeat and bitterness when the sufferer is overqualified for the often mundane work found for them.

In Iain M Banks’ novel “The Algebraist”, the dilemma of suicidal ideation is dealt with when the protagonist Fassin Taak learns of the destruction of his

homeworld. Such rumination in a fictitious character from the pen of a non-sufferer is commendable if done well. Fassin Taak is plausible in his agony: "He wasn't going to kill himself, it would be too easy."

However, a nasty prejudice emerges when sufferers write of their own experience. Sylvia Plath received unfair criticism for the "Bell Jar" in the form of James Dickey's comment that "suicide attempts and then writing about your suicide attempts is just pure bullshit"(Linkography). And J K Rowling embodied her struggles with Depression in the form of "the Dementors" – creatures that feed on human happiness – in the Harry Potter series(Rowling, 2000), and she swiftly came under unsympathetic attack from Christian Campaigners who believed her books would indoctrinate children into the dark arts(Linkography).

Beyond stigmatisation, a hurdle Mental Illness sufferers have to face is the realisation that hoping for sympathy in their predicament is counter to an upwardly mobile work ethic in a modern society. Indeed, in Philip K Dick's book "Valis" the protagonist's therapist mournfully points out "If you want to get better then stop trying to help people". In a society where people struggle for notice and attention, it seems only natural that those who have fallen behind in their progress in life due to dealing with an illness should be disregarded as underachievers. This is still discrimination, but sadly it makes a compelling excuse for it.

In the television series "Twin Peaks" (Filmography)the hinge-factor of the drama is solving the murder of the young protagonist Laura Palmer. In the course of the investigation Laura is revealed to be a cocaine addict and to also be wrestling with hypersexuality, a recognisable symptom of bipolar disorder. Her psychiatrist Dr Jacoby comments of her cocaine use that "The fact that she was attempting to self-medicate is positive". In the playing out of the psychodrama, Agent Cooper's investigation of the murder reveals the corruption of the underbelly of this small logging town. A Science Fiction element is introduced when Agent Cooper starts using Zen Meditation practises and Dream Interpretation to aid in his investigation, and soon he is experiencing paranormal encounters with the Spirit Guardians of the Forest. In terms of cultivating a level of sympathy for a mentally ill character, Twin Peaks has scenes to acknowledge that Laura is a victim of her condition; her friend Donna Hayward cannot quite articulate her friend's illness, but describes her in subhuman terms "Laura was wild"; Laura's platonic boyfriend James Hurley attempts to save her from her self-destructive

involvement in the antics sponsored by the local brothel. Laura is shown as torn between her awareness of spirituality and love, calling out that she loves Hurley as she runs off, and the addiction she has to adrenaline-fuelled transgressive sexual encounters that lead to her death. Laura Palmer's death is constructed in Science Fiction terms, as, though in terms of straight drama she is murdered by her father, a subplot of Twin Peaks is that her father is possessed by a spirit of Twin Peaks' Ancient Evil called "Bob". Again, this shows that a narrative infused by Science Fiction elements can deliver a strong cautionary tale (Williams, 2005) about real life in a far more engaging way than a straight drama would; Twin Peaks written as straight drama with no Paranormal Element as light relief would be too nauseating to hold the attention.

Robert Sheckley's protagonist in "Mindswap" (Sheckley, 1965) is catapulted to Mars by means of a technology that exchanges his personality with that of an alien. He is then forced into a sequence of misfortunes triggered by the fact that his host body is in fact stolen and the criminal has taken flight in his own body back on Earth. This aligns with the mundane lifestyle real life sufferers have to adopt, as they adapt, after experiencing the dangerous but exhilarating symptoms. Sheckley's story idea taps into a key philosophical concern, that of problems of identity.

The Star Trek episode "Charlie X" (Filmography) deals with a character raised by aliens who has taken on their superhuman abilities. Charlie is going through adolescence and so is often disruptive to the running of the Enterprise. When Captain Kirk tries to interest him in sports, Charlie lacks the patience to learn the basic falls in judo. So when he is demonstrated to be inferior to an experienced wrestler, instead of accepting he is an amateur he angrily evaporates his opponent. He also melts chess pieces instead of learning the rules to chess. As concerns over Charlie's outbursts escalate, he develops a crush on a member of the crew, Yeoman Rand. Kirk tries to explain the complexity of matters of the heart, and Charlie sets out on a rampage across the ship, removing people's faces and their ability to laugh. Eventually the aliens that raised him intervene and offer to take Charlie back, and he mounts an impassioned plea not to be banished to a life of passionless, cold abstraction. He is teleported away and the crew are left stunned, stunned that they feel pity for the one who had so recently been holding a tyrannical sway over them. This is analogous to the pity felt for

Mental Illness sufferers who have so little in their lives when cared for at Inpatient centres.

The science fiction works closest in theme to the Creative Segment I give here are Arthur C Clarke and Frederick Pohl's "The Last Theorem" (Clarke & Pohl, 2009) and Carl Sagan's "Contact" (Sagan, 1985). The Last Theorem concerns a distant intelligent race of aliens that have become aware of our level of advancement through observing the flashes from the atmospheric testing of Nuclear Weapons. "Contact" concerns the progress of a government department investigating a signal of intelligent origin. Though elements of my story are similar to Clarke's "Childhood's End" (Clarke, 1953), I have avoided this; the aliens in my story are not here to subjugate humanity, but merely to sweep it aside for the greater Galactic good; this is morally justified as humanity's consciousness is kept alive on computers. Clarke has his aliens toy with humanity, and then they elevate a chosen few to their level. My story is closer to the sentiment of "Farewell to the Master" (Bates, 1940), which was the inspiration for the movie "The day the earth stood still" (Filmography).

The eighties Dr Who episode "The Happiness Patrol" (Filmography) shows the Doctor encountering a society where Happiness is rigorously enforced by a totalitarian party who carry out executions on those not living up to their façade. At the time this was a parody targeting Thatcherism, striking a chord among those who felt that the then Prime Minister's reforms were ruthless. However, it also serves as a metaphor for the influence of the Pharmaceutical Industry on Mental Illness. Someone living in America would be bombarded with adverts for various antidepressants. Likewise, free newspapers on the London Underground carry adverts for Stress Seminars. There seems to be a Snake Oil bandwagon that trades alongside genuine cases of Mental Illness, trying to say; "Do see all these Mental Illness sufferers? Surely you are one of them yourself and need our product!" This in turn creates cynicism on the part of friends of genuine sufferers, and these friends may become unconvinced their friend really has a condition and has instead been taken in by advertising.

Chapter Four

Writing and Storytelling

The classical reference work on storytelling structure is Aristotle's *Poetics* (Aristotle, 1996). This deals very formally with what defines a tragic plot, a comic plot and the features which bring about enjoyment in the audience. This work has been augmented by Joseph Campbell's "Hero with a Thousand Faces" (Campbell, 1993), which draws upon a wide range of World Mythology to propose an essential story structure known popularly as "The Hero's Journey".

From there, many DIY how-to-write books emerged, ranging from the very technical to the extremely whimsical. I myself prefer a few written by Sci Fi and Horror writers, such as Stephen King's "Danse Macabre" (King, 1982) and "On Writing" (King, 2000), Bob Shaw's "How to Write Science Fiction" (Shaw, 1993), Ray Bradbury's "Zen and the Art of Writing" (Bradbury, 1990), Ben Bova's "The Craft of Writing Science Fiction that Sells" (Bova, 1993) and Orson Scott Card's "How to write Science Fiction & Fantasy" (Card, 1990). Also in my collection is a thesis on "Writing the Violent Subject" in fantasy fiction by Elana Gomel called "Bloodscripts" (Gomel, 2003), a rare memoir of Science Fiction Writing by Larry Niven entitled "Niven's Laws" (Niven, 1984) and Margaret Atwood's fascinating "Negotiating with the Dead" (Atwood, 2003).

The chapter of “Bloodscripts” I find influential is “Utopia Noir”. To defend what seems here to be a crossing into the Horror genre from Science Fiction, I would say that Science Fiction deals implicitly with the horrific when it proposes a scenario where the future is descending into bleakness and futility. And Elena Gomel chooses a Science Fiction quote to start this chapter, some lines from William Gibson’s “The Gernsback Continuum”. To Gomel, postmodern culture is atoning for the failure of the two predominating ideologies of the 20th Century; Nazism and Communism. The New Man of Nazism is an engine of nature, while the Soviet New Man is an adept of Oedipal self-deception. The sublime unity of the Communist ideal necessitates a dual consciousness in the face of ideological failure. And so in Gomel’s thesis, Science Fiction’s utopian ideals are constrained by the violence involved in bringing them about; once unleashed, the tide cannot be recalled and the new vision is swept away along with the old.

In Adam Roberts’ contribution to the New Critical Idiom series, “Science Fiction”(Roberts, 2000) the chapter on Metaphor proposes that Science Fiction substitutes the rational for the corporeal and the technological for the organic. And so a discourse of the machine, the robotic, represents a return to the repressed text that requires a psychoanalytic interpretation. In “Lacan and Narration”(Davis, 1983), Robert Davis invites participation in the “subversive act” of creating books. A close reading of Science Fiction in psychoanalytic terms would lead to comment on “significant absences”; that the enraptured gaze focussing on technology, on novelties of new societal arrangement, represent a repressed dissatisfaction or detachment from the real world.

In “The Novel & Revolution”(Swingewood, 1975), Alan Swingewood comments on the use of utopias in fiction; that they can predict technological advances in the real world; for Swingewood, the goal in Science Fiction is keeping the alert sounded against totalitarian resurgence, and so his references are restricted to polemic-fictions such as Orwell’s “1984”(Orwell, 1949), Zamyatin’s “We”(Zamyatin, 1921) or Morris’s “News from Nowhere”(Morris, 1890).

Patricia Highsmith is mainly known for the books concerning her charismatic and sociopathic confidence trickster “Ripley”(Highsmith, 1974). However, in a lesser known collection of short stories “Tales of Natural and Unnatural Catastrophes” (Highsmith, 1988) she establishes herself differently on the literary scene with a number of science-fantasy stories. Large tumours grow over gravestones in one story. A whale carries a lattice of undersea mines into shipping in another. Ants

take over an apartment building in another. This is an interesting collection on its own, but raises further intrigue when compared to James Tiptree Jr's collection "Ten thousand light years from home" (Tiptree, 1973). At first one might remark that Tiptree's collection is more accessible to the Science Fiction fan, as the characters and settings are more traditionally Space-based. However, James Tiptree Jr. was actually a pseudonym of Alice Sheldon, a former intelligence operative who had apparently tired of being "the first woman in some damned occupation" (Profile in April 1983's Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine). And so this highlights the pressure of a predominantly male vision in the genre; the psychoanalytic deconstruction is still of use, if one considers that Patricia Highsmith felt no need for a male pseudonym. For Alice Sheldon, however, a mere change of tone in one's writing was not enough and it was only after adopting a male persona that she felt the confidence to publish her first book.

Marc Scott Zicree's "Magic Time" series (Zicree et al, 2001) features a character, who, in the midst of his travails in a world stripped of technology and which instead runs on magic, must still scavenge in chemist shops for psychiatric medication. This is not written for humorous effect and adds an extra human dimension to the character; psychiatric medication here is not something dismissed in the text's pursuit of escapism. This enhances the willing suspension of disbelief, as a real element, mental illness, is portrayed alongside fictional introductions, the magical powers.

In sharp contrast, there is a vignette written by Seth MacFarlane for his character "Roger the Alien" (Filmography, Linkography), who is housebound as one of the conditions of living with an Earth family, the Smiths. Out of sheer boredom, Roger takes on various personas, often with an elaborate disguise to go with them. In one episode Roger swears that he will take more of an interest in chores so long as he can incorporate a disguise; and so he opts for "Colton Lansington, a Space Captain who struggles to keep his bipolar disorder in check". Francine optimistically plays along: "Okay, Colton, you've just had a busy space-day, and now you'd like to cool down with some intergalactic iced tea." But before the words "Now you take two scoops of powder—" are even out of Francine Smith's mouth, "Colton" is slamming her head in the fridge and yelling "I'm off my meds!" Now this is indisputably funny, and isn't trying to make any significant point. But it still adds to the drift of discriminatory representations of Mental Illness; a recent lecture by Prof. George Szmuckler (Linkography) patiently laid

out again the fact that the Mentally Ill population does not represent as great a risk as people popularly believe. Indeed the perceived aggression of the unmedicated sufferer is misunderstood, and in embracing that misunderstanding non-sufferers believe sufferers always escalate their eccentricity to aggression; sufferers are more at risk of assault than non-sufferers, probably because non-sufferers can pretend a sense of duty – “for the greater good” - in order to perpetrate some childish bullying.

In drawing out the story of the Creative Segment, I have tried to let premise organically create character and mood. There is much credit due to my inspiring source material, and the inspiring creativity teaching I've received along the way. It turned out that the “Face on Mars” McDaniel report did not make quite so central an appearance as I had hoped. People are often surprised that high quality serious-minded work exists on paranormal subjects. Jon Ronson’s “The Men Who Stare at Goats” (Ronson, 2004), for example, recently popularised a US Intelligence Exercise in trying to develop psychic powers in a coterie of soldiers, under the guidance of Jim Channon, who extensively researched the New Age movement of the 70s(Channon, 2010). This work of journalism has been overshadowed by a movie adaptation. And a fair-minded interpretation of these stories of psychic abilities would conclude that it wasn't so much the reality of psychic warfare that was being pursued, so much as the tactical advantage of having the enemy believe that your troop had psychic power at their disposal, whether this is a real capability or not. It is a conceit of the Alien Contact Story Excerpt I have written that someone tinkering with this hobby has led someone to stumble into an arena where there is genuinely something to find; an alien race starts communicating in return. Jim Channon claims his inspiration point was discovering that Vietnam Soldiers in his command did not shoot to kill(Ronson, 2004); they would fire up, as if disinclined by nature to cause harm. From there Channon saw a need to develop an overarching philosophy in the Army; a comforting ideology that made Alain Enthoven's spartan “kill-targets” strategy of fighting the Vietnam War(Filmography)seem like a small part of a greater approach.

In the creative segment I offer, there is an acknowledgement that the spirituality of sufferers seems to be overwhelmed with personal embitterment; that old certainties about God have landed the sufferer Theo with his diagnosis; said beliefs have “outed” him, so to speak. And having readjusted he is confronted

with an empty yearning towards a greater appreciation of life and society that religion would afford, but ultimately he feels “locked out of the club” as paradoxically the conscious choice to join a spiritual community and to once again, with consciousness of it and on medication no less, show Religiosity would be misinterpreted as a relapse.

Likewise, there is much to be endured as the artist of creative writing, not merely in fending off naysayers. There are those who condemn book collecting as hoarding, and the keeping of journals in elegant notebooks as evidence of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. Jon Ronson (2011) does acknowledge that the encroachment of Psychiatric Classification is swallowing up more and more territory in the name of classifying behaviours previously thought of as incidental as new conditions. In an amusing sidenote, Ronson observes that Internet Addiction (Compulsive Blogging), only made it into the index of the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association; the writers of the DSM-V probably felt they might receive a backlash, underestimating the popularity of the Internet. And they would be right to show such humility since Homosexuality was once classified as a disorder and now is not. And there is currently a controversy over the National Institute of Mental Health in America abandoning the DSM-V since the DSM ethos that Conditions can be diagnosed by symptom clusters is no longer supportable. Instead the view now is that “Patients deserve better... [the] NIMH has launched...[a] project to transform diagnosis by incorporating genetics, imaging, cognitive science, and other levels of information to lay the foundation for a new classification system”(Linkography).

And this has to sit alongside the controversy between secular culture’s and Faith-oriented culture’s respective constructions of Mental Illness. Mental Illness seems to conveniently occupy the void left in the narrative of original sin. A more realistic mindset elevates the sufferer from seeing his prospects in a defeatist hue but sadly not all sufferers are equally equipped, and the NHS has a poor track record in equipping them.

Alongside the double standard of secular and religious culture regarding different things as sane, there is the predicament of caregiving towards a community denoted in folklore as failing. This is illustrated in the Stanford Prison Experiment (Banks & Zimbardo, 1973), where a group split into roles of prisoners and guards exceeded the parameters of safe conduct, merely due to the excuse of a

psychological study (the original Stanford Prison Experiment had to be abandoned for the safety of participants). In the analogous roleplaying environment of actual caregivers and Inpatients, there is an implied sanction that (and this is an entirely reprehensible attitude) inpatients do not deserve care by fact of being inpatients; and should instead be seen as dehumanised targets, not people at a low point in life.

A further complication to the issue of discrimination is that illness is currently diagnosed (see above) via experiential tests known as Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (Michael, 2004) which consist of structured conversations that supposedly “elicit” symptoms. These may be a solution to time and budgetary constraints preventing proper testing of admissions, but they are still not rigorous. Anti-psychiatry campaigners often highlight the problem of the Martha Mitchell Effect; where a doctor will hastily make a diagnosis without fact-checking; and this manifests in the writing into medical notes of the patients’ real-life experiences as if they are delusional symptoms; merely calling them “objective” does not make them so.

The landscape of Psychiatry has not caught up with changes in the modern lifestyle. Increasingly, social isolation is not a matter of concern, as people use the Internet to connect with people if they are socially awkward. And, for better or ill, a culture of gadgetry has grown exponentially. This has manifested in public boisterousness or hostility being more commonplace; people hold their loud cell-phone calls, play their adult Game Boys or intrusively photograph those around them without asking permission (Truss, 2005).

And Psychiatry has, through over-reliance on the biological model, put other methodologies to the wall. In a recent TED Lecture (Linkography) Ken Robinson spoke with disdain of a child about to be medicated as ADD, whose eager-for-quiet parent was then gently advised by the GP to send her to a dance school. RD Laing, similarly, once advised a patient with a “compulsion to sit still”, to become an artist’s model. And as well as pushing one methodology, the situation is further exacerbated by the pressure Psychiatrists are under themselves to meet managerial targets; the NHS runs on a system of meeting targets to show job performance; this translates to a callous disregard for running the risk of misdiagnosing.

This may seem a convoluted chapter to speak about the technique of creativity, but I am, I hope, conveying the source of my passion for the subject matter. The Creative Excerpt I have provided does not represent a completed story, but I hope an engaging journey, with a cliff-hanger that allows for further fictionalisation and exploration of the themes.

Chapter Five

Critique and Resolution

The Creative Segment I have put forth for this Dissertation serves as an allegorical microcosm for the day to day challenge a sufferer faces, of rebuilding self-belief. And in rebuilding that self-belief, holding faith that this will be reciprocated in the faith of one's fellow man; that the sufferer will be allowed the dignity of work and freedom within the culture.

In the article “Summing up Speculation” Arlan Andrews vents the frustrations of someone in the employ of government as a futurist, a visionary, and not being taken entirely seriously(Andrews, 2012). Andrews can only point to recent upgrades in airport security being “presciently” predicted by various science fiction stories. He also sets out to warn that the nomenclature of the various Defensive Departments of the United States sound hostile and alienating; “Homeland”, in “Department of Homeland Security”, for instance, has resonances with “the Gestapo” and “the Fatherland”. Andrews relates his despair at one seminar, where he felt pushed to stand up and proclaim: “All these ideas have turned up before, in science fiction stories, many of which I wrote myself”.

Psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger, in the 1930s essay “Dream and Existence” opined that modern man must build his world in his own heart, having made himself lord and master over his own life and death, and so can expect no support from the external world that is ruled by economic, spiritual and technical powers(Lanzoni, 2004). Ludwig acknowledged the nostalgia for Ancient Man, who never knew such primal loneliness. To support this thesis of a truth located in the individual self, Binswanger published a series of case studies on the “manic flight

of ideas" which instigated the Existential Psychiatric Approach. Binswanger argues against an associationist interpretation of manic symptoms, maintaining that there is a coherent self that is evidenced by occasional "existential structures" that can be detected holding various sections of "pressured speech" together.

But a decade after the publication of "Dream and Existence" a different approach to the social problem of Mental Illness was adopted: in 1946 Congress could not ignore the size of the Mental Problem in America due to the World War II Draft figures and so the National Mental Health Act was passed and for the first time Mental Health was acknowledged as a national problem.(Filmography)

Bradley Lewis points out a tripling of the handing out of drugs between 1980 and 2000; the pharmaceutical companies were clearly keen on aggressively promoting "life-style" drugs for chronic conditions, of which the psychiatric conditions formed a subgroup(Lewis, 2009). This alone hints at the "disease mongering" that occurs in psychiatric circles. He also alludes to how psychiatry is limited by our linguistic constructions of reality. And there is a natural bias in Psychiatry towards those who manage to be within the reach of their community's support when their problems arise; a truer picture of the crisis in Psychiatry is given when the failure statistics are included.

Vera Benczik foregrounds the archetype of the Alien as a rebus upon which to project our anxieties about identity(Benczik, 2012). This is put into play through the Joseph Campbell model of the Hero's Journey(Campbell, 1993), the Mythic Quest, but with reference to Ursula K Guin's "Dancing to Ganam" as this provides an exemplar criticism(Guin, 1994). The two quest narratives in Guin's story criticise the notion of an authentic text, as the alien protagonist is trying to re-enact a quest, but seen through the prism of his otherness. And so the secondary protagonists argue over whether Dalzul's death in pursuit of his dream was worthwhile; objectively what he sought didn't exist, but subjectively he believed it did. This has analogous application to the Mental Illness dilemma, as often the therapy outcomes of a sedated life for a patient may be at odds with a patient's unwillingness to lay ambitions aside.

Kerstein Bergman makes a case for the legitimising role of science in fiction(Bergman, 2012), drawing upon various television thrillers that utilise forensic science. However, the science here is under the duress of the emotional

investment a thriller audience demands from it. Justice must be done and wrongdoers must be caught, so the science is portrayed as rapid, unambiguous and infallible, which is sadly not the case in the real world. And the science of Science Fiction does not have the similar duress that a thriller audience brings, although there is no reason why a Science Fiction narrative should not include a murder mystery, of which Asimov's "Caves of Steel" is a commendable example(Asimov, 1958), one of many.

Neil Easterbrook takes up Donald Morse's challenge to teach fantasy in the modern world by dissecting two works: "Pan's Labyrinth" by Guillermo Del Toro and "Mirrormask" by Dave McKean(Easterbrook, 2012). Both these works concern a young female protagonist who descends into her own fantasy world in order to shield herself from the stresses of reality. In Mirrormask, the young woman Helena cannot bear to see her father's dreams of running a circus fall apart while her mother battles with cancer. In Pan's Labyrinth the child Ofelia is taken into hiding from Franco's fascists. It may be uncharitable to invoke an analogy to schizoaffective states here, but there is a sense in both films of "semiotic arousal", that the fantasy landscapes are laden with meaningful symbols known only to the paranoid sufferer. The symbolic maze is worked through in both narratives, leaving the heroines stronger and more self-assured. This then is an attenuated metaphor of the real condition, where the symbolic world entirely engulfs the experiencer.

Rachel Liebert in her essay "Synaptic Peacekeeping: of Bipolar and Securitisation" shows how a politicised linguistic challenge to the reductionism of Psychiatrists can elevate the sufferer from the flat existence of living with a label (Liebert, 2010). She too sounds a warning that medicine & over-diagnosis are encroaching on civil liberties; the keeping of the peace at the expense of letting sufferers return to their own ambitions.

Maria Farland introduces recondite anthropologist W.E.B Dubois and discusses a lost Anthropological Study of his concerning the Limits of Racial Uplift, which I include for its analogical relevance to the issue of Mental Health(Farland, 2006). DuBois, in a similar vein to BF Skinner mentioned above, wrote a novel to illustrate his scientific ideas called "The History of the Negro Home". This was after Dubois abandoned field research, since he had become disillusioned with the "retrogressivist" Negro Brain Science of his colleagues. This was the alarming view that Negros could readily be seen to be an evolutionary dead end.

This mirrors the confirmation bias that persists towards mental health sufferers; that once a Doctor or Nurse has seen enough bad cases, the assumption will arise that all cases are hopeless. Dubois worked tirelessly to refute racialist brain science and successfully strove to modify the parameters and tacit rules of the institutional and professional interactions that were governing the production of scientific knowledge in his world. It is to be hoped that a similarly principled spirit exists in most disciplines.

In his interview with Donald Morse, Zoltan Abadi-Nagy draws out of the renowned sci fi writer the opinion that one needs a “Novel of Conduct” in one’s reading history; a lodestar of the ideal form, that also provides a heartland for the nascent author to cherish while reifying his own literary ambitions(Abadi-Nagy, 2012. For Morse, this was James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Morse goes on to describe a liking for a theologian Paul Tillich, who would write novels to illustrate philosophical dilemmas. Morse sees Vonnegut as a most inspirational writer working in Sci Fi, and relates his apocalyptic themes to such real-life phenomena as the dispersal of the Millerite sect and the rise of writers profiteering on religious end-time narratives; such as Tim McVey’s “Left Behind” series. If I were asked where to look for a novelistic style in which to immerse oneself, I would recommend the Dune Saga for its grandeur, realistic world-building and vivid tone.

Marleen Barr offers an article in which various notable politicians are shown to quote Science Fiction themes and notions in order to humorously engage with the electorate(Barr, 2012). She draws on Samuel Delaney’s concept of “the language of Science Fiction” and refers to a talk he gave at a Modern Language Association meeting, where he announced that “people read science fiction differently from any other genre...the people who don’t like or don’t read science fiction... *can’t* read science fiction”. This may seem needlessly elitist, but it does show that science fiction is called upon in 21st Century political debate to give a sense of rhetorical uplift; to lend the speaker an aura of erudition.

Darko Suvin explores the politicisation of Darwinism in his essay “Darwinism left & right: and two SF Probes.” Suvin addresses the conflict between Darwin’s own scientific curiosity and desire to add to the sum of human knowledge, and different demagogues’ attempts to use Darwinian theory to justify their ideology(Suvin, 2010).

In “Stanley Weinbaum: We’ve met the aliens and they are us”, Suvin deconstructs the stories of a writer whose human protagonists use the alien landscapes they traverse to spiritually reinvent themselves, raising questions of the authenticity of a stable human identity. Suvin also brings out Weinbaum’s dedication to structured writing by showing similarities between “Parasite Planet” and “The Lotus Eaters”(Suvin, 2010).

Richard Lovett discourses on “Theme: the Art of Writing About Something”. He foregrounds an interview with Joss Whedon, writer-director of the space series “Firefly”, who realised that writing entertaining stories was not enough for him, even though that is what he first set out for. Instead, he felt an overwhelming duty to have a moral core to his work, which Lovett encourages in aspiring writers even though opening up about one’s vulnerabilities can be intimidating(Lovett, 2012).

Elena Glasberg’s essay “Viral Things” introduces the idea of the Alien as an element that makes us fearful of the stability of our bodies and our minds(Glasberg, 2012). So she invokes the creature from John Carpenter’s “The Thing”; a creature that invades an Arctic Research Camp and then picks off the scientists one by one, adopting the form of each successive scientist it consumes. This speaks to the spiritual dilemma in man, that there is a striving to be more than a collection of organs; a yearning for meaning and spiritual fulfilment in all our experiments in language and art.

Conclusion

In “The Creation of Life: Past, Future, Alien” Andrew Scott provides chemical equations for DNA-like structures that, rather than being based on carbon, are based on silicon or crystals, in order to speculate on how alien life might arise(Scott, 1986). There is also discussion of the seminal Urey-Miller experiment, where a hermetically sealed collection of chemicals mimicking primordial Earth were shown to eventually give rise to the precursors of self-replicating molecules. Most inspiring is a picture of Europa, the ice moon of Jupiter, which may, through gravitational friction, have a warmer internal sea conducive to life.

In “The Gendered Cyborg”(Kirkup et al, 2000), Alison Adam(Subheading “The comfort of Cyborgs”) describes the cyborg as breaching the boundaries of male and female, as the mechanical elements empower the physical; and a breaching of the boundaries between human and machine, as computational and resilience features are conferred too. Analogously, for the purposes of this discourse, the breaching of the boundary between madness and sanity can be argued too; that the cyborg represents the rehabilitated sufferer, striving for acceptance though marked by difference; analogously the medications and therapy sessions are indicated metaphorically by cybernetic elements replacing or enhancing the organs of the wounded protagonist in a science fiction narrative.

It is to be hoped that Science Fiction that addresses this issue will confer authenticity and acclaim on the Sufferer Protagonist. An analogy would be an avoidance of what becomes of the Alien played by David Bowie in the Nicolas Roeg film “The man who fell to Earth”(Filmography), based on the novel by Walter Tevis (Tevis, 1963). Throughout the film the Alien, despite his successes on Earth as an inventor trying to finance a return trip to his home-world, feels constrained to keep his identity a secret from everyone except for a close circle. His girlfriend pleads “Let them see you as you are”; outside of his human-skin suit and without the contact lenses that hide his reptilian eyes. Near the end of the film the Government capture the Alien and fuse his contact lenses into his head, so that he can never authentically prove he is an Alien and must instead remain a crank, an impresario. I would like to inspire others to pursue the creation of similar explorations of this theme.

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